STORIES REVIVED

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Second Series

A PASSIONATE PILGRIM. ROSE-AGATHE.
POOR RICHARD. THE LAST OF THE VALERII.
MASTER EUSTACE.
THE ROMANCE OF CERTAIN OLD CLOTHES.
A MOST EXTRAORDINARY CASE.

BY

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London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1885

PS2110 .E85 1885 v. 2

Printed by R. & R. Clark, *Edinburgh.*

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STORIES REVIVED.

A PASSIONATE PILGRIM.

I.

INTENDING to sail for America in the early part of June, I determined to spend the interval of six weeks in England, of which I had dreamed much but as yet knew nothing. I had formed in Italy and France a resolute preference for old inns, deeming that what they sometimes cost the ungratified body they repay the delighted mind. On my arrival in London, therefore, I lodged at a certain antique hostelry, far to the east of Temple Bar, deep in what I used to denominate the Johnsonian city. Here, on the first evening of my stay, I descended to the little coffee-room and bespoke my dinner of the genius of "attendance," in the person of the solitary waiter. No sooner had I crossed the threshold of this apartment than I felt I had cut a golden-ripe crop of English "impressions." The coffee-room of the Red Lion, like so many other places and things I was destined to see in the motherland, seemed to have been waiting for long years, with just that sturdy

sufferance of time written on its visage, for me to come and discover romantic meanings in it.

The latent preparedness of the American mind for even the most characteristic features of English life is a fact I never have got to the bottom of. The roots of it are so deeply buried in the soil of our early culture that, without some great upheaval of experience, it would be hard to say exactly when and where and how it begins. It makes an American's enjoyment of England an emotion more intimate, as the French say, than his enjoyment, for instance, of Italy or Spain. I had seen the coffee-room of the Red Lion years ago, at home—at Saragossa, Illinois—in books, in visions, in dreams, in Dickens, in Smollett, in Boswell. It was small, and subdivided into six narrow compartments by a series of perpendicular screens of mahogany, something higher than a man's stature, furnished on either side with a meagre uncushioned ledge, denominated in ancient Britain a seat. In each of these rigid receptacles was a small table, which in crowded seasons was expected to accommodate no less than four pairs of active British elbows. But crowded seasons had passed away from the Red Lion for ever. It was crowded only with memories and ghosts and atmosphere. Round the room there marched, breast-high, a magnificent panelling of mahogany, so dark with time and so polished with unremitted friction, that by gazing awhile into its lucid blackness I fancied I could discern the lingering images of a party of gentlemen in periwigs and short-clothes, just arrived from York by the coach. On the

dark yellow walls, coated by the fumes of English coal, of English mutton, of Scotch whiskey, were a dozen melancholy prints, sallow-toned with age —the Derby favourite of the year 1807, the Bank of England, her Majesty the Queen. On the floor was a Turkey carpet—as old as the mahogany, almost, as the Bank of England, as the Queen—into which the waiter, in his lonely revolutions, had trodden so many massive sootflakes and drops of overflowing beer that the glowing looms of Smyrna would certainly not have recognised it. To say that I ordered my dinner of this superior being would be altogether to misrepresent the process, owing to which, having dreamed of lamb and spinach and a *salade de saison*, I sat down in penitence to a mutton-chop and a rice pudding. Bracing my feet against the cross-beam of my little oaken table, I opposed to the mahogany partition behind me that vigorous dorsal resistance which expresses the old-English idea of repose. The sturdy screen refused even to creak; but my poor Yankee joints made up the deficiency. While I was waiting for my chop there came into the room a person whom, after I had looked at him a moment, I supposed to be a fellow-lodger, and probably the only one. He seemed, like myself, to have submitted to proposals for dinner; the table on the other side of my partition had been prepared to receive him. He walked up to the fire, exposed his back to it, consulted his watch, and looked apparently out of the window, but really at me. He was a man of something less

than middle age and more than middle stature, though indeed you would have called him neither young nor tall. He was chiefly remarkable for his exaggerated leanness. His hair, very thin on the summit of his head, was dark, short, and fine. His eye was of a pale, turbid gray, unsuited, perhaps, to his dark hair and well-drawn brows, but not altogether out of harmony with his colourless, bilious complexion. His nose was aquiline and delicate; beneath it reposed a soft, horizontal moustache. His mouth and chin were meagre and uncertain of outline; not vulgar, perhaps, but weak. A cold, fatal, gentlemanly weakness, indeed, seemed expressed in his attenuated person. His eye was restless and deprecating; his whole physiognomy, his manner of shifting his weight from foot to foot, the spiritless droop of his head, told of exhausted intentions, of a will relaxed. His dress was neat and careful, and he might have been in mourning. I made up my mind on three points: he was a bachelor, he was out of health, he was not indigenous to the soil. The waiter approached him, and they murmured momentarily in tones barely audible. I heard the words "claret," "sherry," with a tentative inflection, and finally "beer," with a gentle affirmative. Perhaps he was a Russian in reduced circumstances; he reminded me slightly of certain sceptical, cosmopolitan Russians whom I had met on the Continent. While I was considering this facile problem—for you see I was interested—there appeared a short, brisk man, with reddish-brown hair, a vulgar nose, a sharp blue eye, and

a red beard, confined to his lower jaw and chin. My potential Russian was still standing on the rug, with his mild gaze wandering over the dingy ornaments of the room. The other marched up to him, and with his umbrella gave him a playful poke in the concavity of his melancholy waistcoat. "A ha'penny for your thoughts!" said the newcomer.

His companion uttered an exclamation, stared, then laid his two hands on the other's shoulders. The latter looked round at me keenly, compassing me in a momentary glance. I read in its own vague light that this was a transatlantic eyebeam; and with such confidence that I hardly needed to see its owner, as he prepared, with his friend, to seat himself at the table adjoining my own, take from his overcoat-pocket three New York newspapers and lay them beside his plate. As my neighbours proceeded to dine I became conscious that the crumbs of their conversation were scattered pretty freely abroad; I could hear almost all they said, without straining to catch it, over the top of the partition that divided us. Occasionally their voices dropped, as if they remembered that their topic was private, but the mystery pieced itself together, as if on purpose to entertain me. Their utterance was pitched in that key which may, in English air, be called foreign, in spite of resemblances of orthography. The voices were American, however, with a difference; and I had no hesitation in assigning the lighter and softer of the two to the pale, thin gentleman, whom I decidedly preferred to his comrade. The latter began to question him about his voyage.

"Horrible, horrible! I was deadly sick from the hour we left New York."

"Well, you do look considerably reduced," his friend affirmed.

"Reduced! I have been on the verge of the grave. I haven't slept six hours in three weeks." This was said with great gravity. "Well, I have made the voyage for the last time."

"The deuce you have! You mean to stay here for ever?"

"Here, or somewhere! It won't be so long as —some things have been."

There was a pause; after which: "You're the same cheerful old boy, Searle. Going to give up the ghost to-morrow, eh?"

"I almost wish I were."

"You are not in love with England, then? I have heard people say at home that you dressed and talked and acted like an Englishman. But I know Englishmen, and I know you. You're not one of these animals, Searle, not you. You'll go under here, sir; you'll go under as sure as my name is Simmons."

Following this I heard a sudden clatter, as of the dropping of a knife and fork. "Well, you're a delicate sort of creature, Simmons! I have been wandering about all day in this accursed city, ready to cry with home-sickness and heart-sickness and every possible sort of sickness, and thinking, in the absence of anything better, of meeting you here this evening, and of your uttering some syllable of cheer and comfort, and giving me some feeble ray of hope. Go under? Ain't

I under now? I can't sink lower except to sink into my grave!"

Mr. Simmons' brightness appeared to flicker a moment in this gust of despair; but the next it was burning steady again. "Don't cry, Searle," I heard him say. "Remember the waiter. I've grown Englishman enough for that. For heaven's sake, don't let us have any sentiment. Sentiment won't do anything for you here. It's best to come to the point. Tell me in three words what you expect of me."

I heard another movement, as if poor Searle had collapsed in his chair. "Upon my word, Simmons, you're quite inconceivable. You never got my letter?"

"Yes, I got your letter. I was never sorrier to get anything in my life."

At this declaration Mr. Searle rattled out an oath, which it was well perhaps that I but partially heard. "Abijah Simmons," he cried, "what demon of perversity possesses you? Are you going to betray me here in a foreign land, to turn out a false friend, a heartless rogue?"

"Go on, sir," said sturdy Simmons. "Pour it all out. I'll wait till you have done.—Your beer is dreadful bad," to the waiter. "I'll have some more."

"For God's sake, explain yourself!" cried Searle.

There was a pause, at the end of which I heard Mr. Simmons set down his empty tankard with emphasis. "You poor morbid, mooning man," he resumed, "I don't want to say anything to make you feel sore. I pity you. But you must allow

me to say that you have acted more like a wandering maniac than a member of our best society."

Mr. Searle seemed to have made an effort to compose himself. "Be so good as to tell me what was the meaning of your letter."

"Well, I was kind of sentimental myself when I wrote that letter. It came of my always wishing so to please folks. I had much better have let you alone. To tell you the plain truth, I never was so horrified in my life as when I found that on the strength of that letter you had come out here to seek your fortune."

"What did you expect me to do?"

"I expected you to wait patiently till I had made further inquiries and had written to you again."

"You have made further inquiries now?"

"Inquiries! I have made assaults."

"And you find I have no claim?"

"No claim that one of these London fellows will look at. It looked at first as if you had a rather seductive case. I confess the idea took hold of me——"

"Thanks to your liking to please folks!"

Mr. Simmons seemed for a moment to be disgusted with something; it proved to be with his beverage. "This beer is awfully nasty, as you say here," he remarked to the waiter. "I guess I'll have some brandy.—Come, Searle," he resumed, "don't challenge me to the arts of debate, or I'll jump right on top of you! My natural urbanity, as I say, was part of it. The reflection that if I

put the thing through it would be a very pretty feather in my cap and a very pretty penny in my purse, was part of it. And the satisfaction of seeing a horrid low American walk right into an old English estate was a good deal of it. Upon my word, Searle, when I think of it I wish with all my heart that, erratic genius as you are, you had a claim, for the very beauty of it! I should hardly care what you did with the confounded property when you got it. I could leave you alone to turn it into Yankee notions—into ducks and drakes, as they call it here. I should like to see you tearing round over it and kicking up its sacred dust in their very faces!"

"You don't know me, Simmons," said Searle, for all response to this ambiguous compliment.

"I should be very glad to think I didn't, Searle. I have been to no small amount of trouble for you. I have consulted by main force three first-rate men. They smile at the idea. I should like you to see the way they smile, these big-wigs in the Inns of Court—that's what they call 'em—when they want to let you know there's no help for you. I guess it would take it out of you to be simpered at that way. I sounded in person the solicitor of your usurping cousin, and he evidently knew there was something in the wind. It seems your brother George, some twenty years ago, put out a feeler. So you are not to have the glory of even frightening them."

"I never frightened any one," said Searle. "I shouldn't begin at this time of day. I should approach the subject like a gentleman."

"Well, if you want very much to do something like a gentleman, you've got a capital chance. Take your disappointment like a gentleman."

I had finished my dinner, and I had become keenly interested in poor Mr. Searle's unencouraging—or unencouraged—claim; so interested that it was vexatious to hear his emotions reflected in his voice without being able to see them in his face. I left my place, went over to the fire, took up the evening-paper, and established a post of observation behind it.

Abijah Simmons was in the act of choosing a soft chop from the dish—an act accompanied by a great deal of prying and poking with his own personal fork. My disillusioned compatriot had pushed away his plate; he sat with his elbows on the table, gloomily nursing his head with his hands. His companion stared at him a moment, and I imagined there was a certain tenderness in his gaze; but I am not sure whether this was pity or whether it was beer and brandy. "I say, Searle" —and for my benefit, I think, taking me for a native who might be struck with his cleverness, he lifted his voice a little and gave it an ironical ring—"in this country it is the inestimable privilege of a loyal citizen, under whatsoever stress of pleasure or of pain, to make a point of eating his dinner."

Searle disgustedly gave his plate another push. "Anything may happen now," he said. "I don't care a straw."

"You ought to care. Have another chop, and you *will* care. Have some brandy. Take my advice!"

Searle, from between his two hands, looked at him. "I have had enough of your advice," he said.

"A little more," said Simmons mildly; "I sha'n't trouble you again. What do you mean to do?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, come!"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing!"

"Nothing but starve. How about the cash?"

"Why do you ask? You don't care."

"My dear fellow, if you want to make me offer you twenty pounds you set most clumsily about it. You said just now I don't know you. Possibly! There's perhaps no such tremendous difference between knowing you and not knowing you. At any rate, you don't know me. I expect you to go home."

"I won't go home! I have crossed that beastly ocean for the last time."

"What's the matter? Are you afraid?"

"Yes, I'm afraid! 'I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word!'"

"You are more afraid to go than to stay?"

"I shall not stay. I shall leave for another place."

"Oh, are you sure of that?"

"One can always be sure of that."

Mr. Simmons was silent a moment. "Well, you *are* sick!" he exclaimed presently. "All I can say is that if you are going to talk about prussic acid and that sort of thing, we cease to occupy common ground. You can't get a dose of prussic acid for nothing, you know. Look here,

Searle: if you'll consent to return home with me by the steamer of the 23d, I'll pay your passage down. More than that, I'll pay your wine-bill."

Searle meditated. "I believe I never made up my mind to anything before," he said, "but I think it's made up now. I shall stay here till I take my departure for a newer world than that wretched little New World of ours. It's an odd feeling—I rather like it! What should I do at home?"

"You said just now you were homesick."

"I meant I was sick for a home. Don't I belong here? Haven't I longed to get here all my life? Haven't I counted the months and the years till I should be able to go to Europe, as they say? And now that I have got here must I just back out? No, no, I'll move on. I am much obliged to you for your offer. I have enough money for the present. I have about my person some forty pounds' worth of British gold, and the same amount, say, of Yankee vitality. They'll see me through together! After they are gone I shall lay my head in some English churchyard, beside some ivied tower, beneath an old gnarled, black yew."

I had so far distinctly followed the dialogue; but at this point the landlord came in, and, begging my pardon, would suggest that number 12, a most superior apartment, having now been vacated, it would give him pleasure if I would just go and look. I declined to look, but took number 12 at a venture, and transferred my attention back to my friends. They had risen to their feet; Simmons had put on his overcoat; he stood polishing

his rusty black hat with his napkin. "Do you mean to go down to the place?" he asked.

"Possibly. I have thought of it so often I should like to see it."

"Shall you call on Mr. Searle?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Something has just occurred to me," Simmons pursued, with a grin that made his upper lip look more than ever denuded by the razor, and jerked the ugly ornament of his chin into the air. "There's a certain Miss Searle, the old man's sister."

"Well?" said the other, frowning.

"Well, sir! you talk of moving on. You might move on the damsel."

Mr. Searle frowned in silence, and Simmons gave him a tap on the stomach. "Line those ribs a bit first!" The poor gentleman blushed crimson; his eyes filled with tears. "You *are* a coarse brute," he said. The scene was pathetic. I was prevented from seeing the conclusion of it by the reappearance of the landlord, on behalf of number 12. He represented to me that I ought, in justice to him, to come and inspect the premises. Half an hour afterwards I was rattling along in a hansom toward Covent Garden, where I heard Madame Bosio in the *Barber of Seville*. On my return from the opera I went into the coffee-room, for it had occurred to me that I might catch another glimpse of Mr. Searle. I was not disappointed. I found him sitting before the fire, with his head fallen on his breast, fast asleep and dreaming perhaps of Abijah Simmons. I looked

at him for some moments. His closed eyes, in the dim lamplight, looked even more helpless and resigned, and I seemed to see the fine grain of his nature in his unconscious mask. They say fortune comes while we sleep, and, standing there, I felt benevolent enough to be poor Mr. Searle's fortune. As I walked away I perceived in one of the little prandial pews I have described the melancholy waiter, with his whiskered chin, too, reposing on the blankness of his shirt-front. I lingered a moment beside the old inn-yard, in which, upon a time, the coaches and postchaises found space to turn and disgorge. Above the dusky shaft of the enclosing galleries, where lounging lodgers and crumpled chambermaids and all the picturesque domesticity of a rattling tavern must have leaned on their elbows for many a year, I made out the far-off, lurid twinkle of the London constellations. At the foot of the stairs, enshrined in the glittering niche of her well-appointed bar, the landlady sat napping like some solemn idol, amid votive brass and plate.

The next morning, not finding the object of my benevolent curiosity in the coffee-room, I learned from the waiter that he had ordered breakfast in bed. Into this asylum I was not yet prepared to pursue him. I spent the morning moving about London, chiefly on business, but catching all kinds of romantic impressions by the way. To the ingenious American eye the grimy complexion of the British metropolis often flushes with the tints of association. As the afternoon approached, however, I became conscious of a wish to see

something green, and, thinking over the excursions recommended to the ingenuous stranger, decided to take the train to Hampton Court. The day was the more propitious that it yielded just that dim subaqueous light which sleeps so fondly upon the English landscape.

At the end of an hour I found myself wandering through the apartments of the great palace. They follow each other in infinite succession, with no great variety of interest or aspect, but with a sort of regal monotony, and a fine specific effect. They are exactly of their various times. You pass from painted and panelled bedchambers and closets, anterooms, drawing-rooms, council-rooms, through king's suite, queen's suite, prince's suite, until you feel as if you were strolling through the appointed hours and stages of some rigid monarchical day. On one side are the old monumental upholsteries, the big, cold tarnished beds and canopies, with the circumference of disapparelled royalty symbolised by a gilded balustrade, and the great carved and yawning chimney-places, where dukes-in-waiting may have warmed their weary heels; on the other, in deep recesses, rise the immense windows, the framed and draped embrasures where the sovereign whispered and favourites smiled, looking out on the terraced gardens and misty park. The brown walls are dimly illumined by innumerable portraits of persons attached to Court and State, more especially with various members of the Dutch-looking *entourage* of William of Orange, the restorer of the palace; with good store, too, of the lily-bosomed models

of Lely and Kneller. The whole tone of this processional interior is unspeakably stale and sad. The tints of all things have both faded and darkened, and you taste the chill of the place as you walk from room to room. It was still early in the day and in the season, and I flattered myself that I was the only visitor. This idea, however, was dispelled suddenly by my coming upon a person standing motionless before a simpering countess of Sir Peter Lely's creation. On hearing my footstep this victim of an evaporated spell turned his head, and I recognised my fellow-lodger of the Red Lion. I was apparently recognised as well; he looked as if he would be very glad to answer me, were I to speak to him. But he did not wait for this. The next moment, seeing I had a catalogue, he asked the name of the portrait. On my satisfying him, he inquired, timidly, how I liked the lady.

"Well," said I, not quite timidly enough, perhaps, "I confess she seems to me rather slight."

He remained silent, and was evidently a little abashed. As we strolled away he stole a sidelong glance of farewell at his leering shepherdess. To speak with him face to face was to feel keenly that he was infirm but that he was interesting. We talked of our inn, of London, of the palace; he uttered his mind freely, but he seemed to struggle with a weight of depression. It was a simple mind enough, with no great cultivation, but with a certain natural love of pleasant things. I foresaw that I should find him a genuine American, full of that perplexing interfusion of refinement

and crudity which is a sign of our transatlantic taste. His perceptions were delicate, his opinions were probably rather primitive. On my telling him that I was a fellow-citizen, he stopped short and seemed overcome with emotion ; then silently passing his arm into my own, he suffered me to lead him through the other apartments and down into the gardens. A large gravelled platform stretches itself before the basement of the palace, taking the afternoon sun. A portion of the edifice is reserved as a series of private tenements, occupied by state-pensioners, reduced gentlewomen in receipt of the Queen's bounty, and other deserving persons. Many of the apartments have their little private gardens ; and here and there, between their verdure-coated walls, you catch a glimpse of these somewhat stuffy bowers. My companion and I took several turns up and down this quiet terrace, looking down on the floral figures of the rest of the garden and on the stoutly-woven tapestry of creeping plants which muffles the foundations of the huge red pile. I thought of the various images of old-world gentility, which, early and late, must have strolled in front of it and felt the protection and security of the place. We looked through an antique grating into one of the mossy cages, and saw an old lady with a black mantilla on her head, a decanter of water in one hand and a crutch in the other, come forth, followed by three little dogs and a cat, to sprinkle a plant. She would probably have had an opinion on the virtue of Queen Caroline. There are few sensations in life so exquisite as to stand with a

companion in a foreign land and inhale the alien quality of the air and the tonic picturesqueness of things. This common appreciation of local colour makes comrades of strangers. My companion seemed oppressed with enjoyment; he scowled gently, as if it gave him pain. I proposed, at last, that we should dine in the neighbourhood and take a late train to town. We made our way out of the gardens into the adjoining village, where we entered an inn which I pretended, very sincerely, to find excellent. Mr. Searle sat down to table with small apparent interest in the repast, but, gradually warming to his work, he declared at the end of half-an-hour that for the first time in a month he felt an appetite.

"I am afraid you are rather out of health," I said.

"Yes, sir, I'm an incurable."

The little village of Hampton Court stands clustered about the entrance of Bushey Park, and after we had dined we lounged along into the celebrated avenue of horse-chestnuts. There is a rare emotion, familiar to every intelligent traveller, in which the mind seems to swallow the whole sum of its impressions at a gulp. You take in the whole place, whatever it is. You feel England, you feel Italy, and the sensation, for the moment, is accompanied with a sort of excitement. I had known it from time to time in Italy, and had opened my soul to it as to the spirit of the Lord. Since my disembarkation in England I had been waiting for it to arrive. A bottle of tolerable Burgundy, at dinner, had perhaps unlocked to it

the gates of sense ; it arrived now with irresistible force. Just the scene around me was the England of one's early reveries. Over against us, amid the ripeness of its gardens, the dark red residence, with its formal facings and its vacant windows, seemed to make the past definite and massive ; the little village, nestling between park and palace, around a patch of turfy common, with its taverns with figurative names, its ivy-towered church, its mossy roofs, looked like the property of a feudal lord. It was in this dark, composite light that I had perused the British classics ; it was this mild, moist air that had blown from the verses of the poets ; and I seemed to feel the buried generations in the dense and elastic sod.

These reflections came in some form or other from my lips, as I gather, remembering it, from a remark of my companion's.

" You have the advantage over me in coming to all this with an educated eye. You already know the old. I have never known it but by report. I have always fancied I should like it. In a small way at home, you know, I have tried to stick to the old. I must be a conservative by nature. People at home used to call me a cockney. But it wasn't true," he went on ; " if it had been I should have made my way over here long ago—before—before——" He paused, and his head dropped sadly on his breast.

The bottle of Burgundy had loosened his tongue—I felt that it was merely a question of time that I should learn his story. Something told me that I had gained his confidence and he

would unfold himself. "Before you lost your health," I said.

"Before I lost my health," he answered. "And my property—the little I had. And my ambition. And my self-esteem."

"Come!" I said. "You shall recover everything. This tonic English climate will wind you up in a month. And with the return of health all the rest will return."

He sat musing, with his eyes fixed on the distant palace. "They are too far gone — self-esteem especially! I should like to be an old genteel pensioner, lodged over there in the palace, and spending my days in maundering about these classic haunts. I should go every morning, at the hour when it gets the sun, into that long gallery where all those pretty women of Lely's are hung —I know you despise them!—and stroll up and down and pay them compliments. Poor, precious, forsaken creatures! So flattered and courted in their day, so neglected now! Offering up their shoulders and ringlets and smiles to that deadly silence!"

I laid my hand on my friend's shoulder. "You shall be yourself again yet," I said.

Just at this moment there came cantering down the shallow glade of the avenue a young girl on a fine black horse—one of those little budding gentlewomen, perfectly mounted and equipped, who form to alien eyes one of the prettiest incidents of English scenery. She had distanced her servant, and, as she came abreast of us, turned slightly in her saddle and glanced back at him. In the movement she dropped the hunting-crop

with which she was armed ; whereupon she reined up and looked shyly at us and at the instrument. "This is something better than a Lely," I said. Searle hastened forward, picked up the crop, and, removing his hat with an air of great civility, presented it to the young girl. Fluttered and blushing she reached forward, took it with softly-murmured gratitude, and the next moment was bounding over the quiet turf. Searle stood watching her ; the servant, as he passed us, touched his hat. When Searle turned toward me again I saw that he too was blushing. "I don't think you have come abroad too late," I said, laughing.

A short distance from where we had stopped was an old stone bench. We went and sat down on it and, as the sun began to sink, watched the light mist powder itself with gold. "We ought to be thinking of the train back to London, I suppose," I said at last.

"Oh, hang the train!" said Searle.

"Willingly. There could be no better spot than this to feel the magic of an English twilight." So we lingered, and the twilight lingered around us, strangely clear, in spite of the thickness of the air. As we sat, there came trudging along the road an individual whom, from afar, I recognised as a member of the genus "tramp." I had read about the British tramp in the British novel, but I had never yet encountered him, and I brought my historic consciousness to bear upon the present specimen. As he approached us he slackened pace and finally halted, touching his cap. He was a man of middle age, clad in a greasy bonnet, with

false-looking ear-locks depending from its sides. Round his neck was a grimy red scarf, tucked into his waistcoat; his coat and trousers had a remote affinity with those of a reduced hostler. In one hand he had a stick; on his arm he bore a tattered basket, with a handful of withered vegetables in the bottom. His face was pale, haggard, and degraded beyond description—an extraordinary mixture of the brutal and the insinuating. He too, like everything else, had a history. From what height had he fallen, from what depth had he risen? He was the completest vagabond I had ever encountered. There was a richness of outline about him which filled me with a kind of respect. I felt as if I were in the presence of a personage —a great artist or actor.

"For God's sake, gentlemen," he said, in that raucous tone of weather-beaten poverty suggestive of chronic sore-throat exacerbated by perpetual gin —"for God's sake, gentlemen, have pity on a poor fern-collector!"—turning up his stale dandelions. "Food hasn't passed my lips, gentlemen, in the last three days."

We gaped at him and at each other, and to our imagination his appeal had almost the force of a command. "I wonder if half a crown would be enough?" I murmured. And our fasting botanist went limping away through the park, with a mystery of satirical gratitude superadded to his general mystery.

"I feel as if I had seen my *Doppelganger*," said Searle. "He reminds me of myself. What am I but a tramp, like him?"

"What are you 'anyway,' my friend?" I asked. "Who are you—please?"

The colour rose again to his pale face, and I feared I had offended him. He poked a moment at the sod with the point of his umbrella before answering. "Who am I?" he said at last. "My name is Clement Searle. I was born in New York, and I have lived there all my life. What am I? That's easily told. Nothing! I assure you, nothing, at all."

"A very good fellow, apparently," I remarked, smiling.

"A very good fellow! Ah, there it is! You have said more than you mean. It's by having been a very good fellow all my days that I have come to this. I have drifted through life. I am a failure, sir—a failure as hopeless and helpless as any that ever swallowed up the slender investments of the widow and the orphan. I don't pay five cents on the dollar. What I might have been —once—there is nothing left to show. I was rotten before I was ripe. To begin with, certainly, I was not a fountain of wisdom. All the more reason for a definite channel—for having a little character and purpose. But I hadn't even a little. I had nothing but nice tastes, as they call them, and fine sympathies and sentiments. Take a turn through New York to-day and you'll find the tattered remnants of these things dangling on every bush and fluttering in every breeze; the men to whom I lent money, the women to whom I made love, the friends I trusted, the dreams I cherished, the poisonous fumes of pleasure, amid

which nothing was sweet or precious but the manhood they stifled! It was my fault that I believed in pleasure here below. I believe in it still, but as I believe in the immortality of the soul. The soul is immortal, certainly—if you have got one; but most people haven't. My taste was to be delicate; well, perhaps I was so! I had a little money; it went the way of my little wit. Here in my pocket I have forty pounds of it left. The only thing I have to show for my early wealth is a little volume of verses, printed at my own expense, in which fifteen years ago I made bold to sing the charms of love and idleness. Six months since I got hold of the volume; it reads like the poetry of fifty years ago. The form is incredible—upon my word. I hadn't seen these old places then—I hadn't seen any form. I should tell you I used to be a precious fool. At present I am not even a fool—I am nothing at all, as I have told you. Was I meant to come to this? Upon my soul I wasn't! If I say what I feel you'll fancy my vanity quite equal to my folly, and set me down as one of those fatuous theorisers after the fact, who draw any moral from their misfortunes but the right one, because that looks bad for them. Take it for what it's worth. I have always fancied that I was meant for a world arranged on different lines. Before heaven, sir—whoever you are—I'm in practice so absurdly tender-hearted that I can afford to say it: I came into the world an aristocrat. I was born with a passion for ancient rites. It condemns me, I confess; but in a measure, too, it absolves me. I

found them nowhere—found a world all hard lines and harsh lights, without shade, without composition, as they say of pictures, without the lovely mystery of colour. To furnish colour I melted down the very substance of my own soul. I went about with my brush, touching up and toning down; a very pretty chiaroscuro you'll find in my track! Sitting here, in this old park, in this old land, I feel—I feel that I hover on the misty verge of what might have been! I should have been born here and not there; here my crude dissipation would have been—don't laugh now!—would have been elegant leisure. How it was that I never came over here is more than I can say. It might have cut the knot; but the knot was too tight. I was always out of health or in debt or entangled. Besides, I had a horror of the sea—with reason, heaven knows! A year ago I was reminded of the existence of an old claim to a portion of an English estate, which has danced before the eyes of my family, at odd moments, any time these eighty years. I confess it's very shadowy and desperately hard to follow. I am by no means sure that to this hour I have got the hang of it. You look as if you had a clear head: some other time, if you consent, we will puzzle it out, such as it is, together. Poverty was staring me in the face; I sat down and tried to commit the 'points' of our case to memory, as I used to get nine-times-nine by heart as a boy. I dreamed about it for six months, half expecting to wake up some fine morning to hear through a latticed casement the cawing of an English rookery. A

couple of months ago there came out here on business of his own a man who once got me out of a dreadful mess—not that I had done any harm—a sharp American lawyer, an extremely common fellow, but with a great deal of *flair*, as they say in New York. It was with him yesterday that you saw me dining. He undertook, as he expressed it, to 'nose round' and see if anything could be made of these vague pretensions of ours. The matter had never seriously been taken up. A month later I got a letter from Simmons, assuring me that things looked monstrous well, that he should be greatly surprised if I were unable to do something. This was the greatest push I had ever got in my life; I took a deliberate step, for the first time; I sailed for England. I have been here three days: it seems three months. After keeping me waiting for thirty-six hours, last evening my precious Simmons makes his appearance and informs me, with his mouth full of mutton, that I was a blasted fool to have taken him at his word; that he had been precipitate, that I had been idiotic, that my claim was moonshine, and that I must do penance and take a ticket for another fortnight of seasickness in his agreeable society. My friend, my friend—shall I say I was disappointed? I am already resigned. I didn't really believe I had any case. I felt in my deeper consciousness that it was the crowning illusion of a life of illusions. Well, it was a pretty one. Poor Simmons—I forgive him with all my heart. But for him I should not be sitting in this place, in this air, with these thoughts. This is a

world I could have got on with beautifully. There is a great fitness in its having been kept for the last. After this nothing would have been tolerable. I shall now have a month of it, I hope, and I shall not have a chance to be disenchanted. There's one thing!"—and here, pausing, he laid his hand on mine; I rose and stood before him—"I wish it were possible you should be with me to the end."

"I promise you to leave you only at your own request," I said. "But it must be on condition of your omitting from your conversation this intolerable flavour of mortality. The end! Perhaps it's the beginning."

He shook his head. "You don't know me. It's a long story. I am incurably ill."

"I know you a little. I have a strong suspicion that your illness is in great measure a matter of low spirits. All that you have told me is but another way of saying that you have lived hitherto in yourself. The tenement's haunted! Live abroad—take an interest!"

He looked at me for a moment with his sad, weak eyes. Then with a faint smile: "Don't cut down a man you find hanging. He has had a reason for it. I am bankrupt."

"Oh, health is money!" I said. "Get well, and the rest will take care of itself. I am interested in your vague pretensions, as you call them, and pretenders, to me, have always been an attractive class. But their first duty is to be gallant."

"Their first duty is to be definite, to understand what they want," he answered, with a languid

smile. "Don't ask me to trace our pedigree now. I'll try some day, but it's a sad muddle. There's no doubt, however, that we are a very old race. But I know nothing of business. If I were to take the matter in hand, I should break in two the poor little silken thread from which everything hangs. In a better world than this I think I should be listened to. But this hard world is no place for ideal justice. There is no doubt that a hundred years ago we suffered a palpable wrong. But we made no appeal at the time, and the dust of a century now lies heaped upon our silence. Let it rest!"

"What is the estimated value of your interest?"

"We were instructed from the first to accept a compromise. Compared with the whole property, our ideas are extremely small. Simmons talked of a hundred and thirty thousand dollars. Why a hundred and thirty I am sure I don't know. Don't beguile me into figures."

"Allow me one more question. Who is actually in possession?"

"A certain Mr. Richard Searle. I know nothing about him."

"He is in some way related to you?"

"Our great-grandfathers were half-brothers. What does that make?"

"Twentieth cousins, say. And where does your twentieth cousin live?"

"At Lockley Park, in Slopeshire."

I reflected a little. "Yes, as I tell you, I am interested in you, Mr. Searle," I said. "In your story, in your title, such as it is, and in Lockley

Park in Slopeshire. Suppose we go down and see it."

He rose to his feet with a certain alertness. "I shall make a sound man of him yet," I said to myself.

"I shouldn't have the heart to accomplish the melancholy pilgrimage alone," he said. "But with you I will go anywhere."

On our return to London we determined to spend three days there together, and then to go into the country. We were equally conscious of that intellectual pressure which London exerts upon those pilgrims from the west who feel it to be the mother-city of their race, the distributing heart of their traditional life. Certain characteristics of London, certain aspects, phases, expressions, are more suggestive to an American than anything else in Europe. The influence of these things on Searle was deep and singular. His observation I soon perceived to be extremely acute. His almost morbid relish for the old, the artificial, the social, well-nigh extinct from long inanition, began to flicker up and illuminate his face and his talk.

We looked up the topography of Slopeshire in a county-guide, which spoke highly, as the phrase is, of Lockley Park. We took up our abode, our journey ended, at a certain little wayside-inn, at which, in the days of leisure, the coach must have stopped for lunch, and burnished pewters of rustic ale been handed up as straight as possible to outsiders athirst with fast travelling. We stopped here for simple admiration of its steep thatched

roof, its latticed windows, its hospitable porch. We allowed a couple of days to elapse in vague, undirected strolls and sweet sentimental observance of the land, before we proceeded to the particular business that had drawn us on. The region I allude to is a compendium of the general physiognomy of England. The noble friendliness of the scenery, its latent old-friendliness, the way we scarcely knew whether we were looking at it for the first or the last time, made it appeal to us at every step. The whole land, in the full, warm rains of the last of April, had burst into sudden, perfect spring. The dark walls of the hedgerows had turned into blooming screens, the sodden verdure of lawn and meadow had been washed over with a lighter brush. We went forth without loss of time for a long walk on the hills, from the summits of which you find half England unrolled at your feet. A dozen broad counties, within the scope of your vision, commingle their green exhalations. Closely beneath us lay the dark, rich hedgy flats and the copse-checkered slopes, white with the blossom of apples. At widely opposite points of the expanse two great towers of cathedrals rose sharply out of a reddish blur of houses, taking the mild English light.

We took an immense deal of notice of this same solar reserve, and found in it only a refinement of art. The sky never was empty and never idle; the clouds were continually at play for our benefit. Over against us, from our station on the hills, we saw them piled and dissolved, condensed and shifted, blotting the blue with

sullen rain-spots, stretching, breeze-fretted, into dappled fields of gray, bursting into an explosion of light or melting into a drizzle of silver. We made our way along the rounded ridge of the downs, and descended through slanting, oblique fields, green to cottage-doors, to where a russet village beckoned us from the interstices of the hedges. Close beside it, I admit, the railway shoots fiercely from its tunnel in the hills; and yet there broods upon this charming hamlet an old-time quietude which seems to make it a violation of confidence to tell its name so far away. We struck through a narrow lane, a green lane, dim with its barriers of hawthorn; it led us to a superb old farmhouse, now rather rudely jostled by the multiplied lanes and roads which have curtailed its ancient appanage. It stands there in stubborn picturesqueness, doggedly submitting to be pointed out and sketched. It is a wonderful image of the domiciliary conditions of the past — cruelly complete; with bended beams and joists, beneath the burden of gables, that seem to ache and groan with memories and regrets. The short, low windows, where lead and glass combine in equal pieces to notify the scowling stranger of the mediæval gloom within, retain their opacity as a part of the primitive idea of defence. Such an old house fills an American with an indefinable feeling of respect. So propped and patched, so tinkered with clumsy tenderness, clustered so richly about its central English sturdiness, its oaken vertebrations, so humanised with ages of use and touches of beneficent affection, it seemed to offer

to our grateful eyes a small, rude symbol of the great English social order. Passing out upon the high-road, we came to the common browsing-patch, the "village-green" of the tales of our youth. Nothing was wanting: the shaggy, mouse-coloured donkey, nosing the turf with his mild and huge proboscis, the geese, the old woman—*the* old woman, in person, with her red cloak and her black bonnet, frilled about the face and double-frilled beside her decent, placid cheeks—the towering ploughman with his white smock-frock, puckered on chest and back, his short corduroys, his mighty calves, his big, red, rural face. We greeted these things as children greet the loved pictures in a story-book, lost and mourned and found again. It was marvellous how well we knew them. Beside the road we saw a ploughboy straddle, whistling, on a stile, and he had the merit of being not only a ploughboy but a Gainsborough. Beyond the stile, across the level velvet of a meadow, a footpath wandered like a streak drawn by a finger over the surface of the stuff. We followed it from field to field and from stile to stile; it was the way to church. At the church we finally arrived, lost in its rook-haunted churchyard, hidden from the workday world by the broad stillness of pastures—a gray, gray tower, a huge black yew, a cluster of village-graves, with crooked headstones and protrusions that had settled and sunk. The whole scene spoke so of a long tradition of worship, that my sensitive companion was quite overcome.

"You must bury me here," he murmured. "It's

the first real church I have seen in my life. How it makes a Sunday where it stands!"

The next day we visited a place of worship more commodious. We walked over to Worcester, through such a mist of local colour that I felt like one of Smollett's pedestrian heroes, faring tavernward for a night of adventures. As we neared the provincial city we saw the steepled mass of the cathedral, long and high, rise far into the cloud-freckled blue. And as we came nearer still, we stopped on the bridge and looked down at the reflection of the solid minster in the yellow Severn. And going further yet we entered the town—where surely Miss Austen's heroines, in chariots and curricles, must often have come a-shopping for their sandals and mittens—we lounged in the gravelled close and gazed insatiably at that most soul-soothing sight, the waning, wasting afternoon-light, the visible ether which feels the voices of the chimes, clinging far aloft to the quiet sides of the cathedral-tower; saw it linger and nestle and abide, as it loves to do on all perpendicular spaces, converting them irresistibly into registers and dials; tasted, too, as deeply, of the peculiar stillness of this clerical precinct; saw a rosy English lad come forth and lock the door of the old foundation-school which dovetails with cloister and choir, and carry his big responsible key into one of the quiet canonical houses: and then stood musing together on the effect on one's mind of having in one's boyhood gone and come through cathedral-shades as a King's scholar, and yet kept ruddy with much

cricket in misty meadows by the Severn. On the third morning we betook ourselves to Lockley, having learned that the greater part of it was open to visitors, and that, indeed, on application, the house was occasionally shown.

Within its enclosure the declining spurs of the hills continued to undulate and subside. A long avenue wound and circled from the outermost gate through an untrimmed woodland, whence you glanced at further slopes and glades and copses and bosky recesses—at everything except the limits of the place. It was as free and untended as the villa of an Italian prince; and I have never seen that angular English fact of landlordism muffle itself in so many concessions. The weather had just become perfect; it was one of the dozen exquisite days of the English year—days stamped with a purity unknown in climates where fine weather is cheap. It was as if the mellow brightness, as tender as that of the primroses which starred the dark waysides like petals wind-scattered over beds of moss, had been meted out to us by the cubic foot—distilled from an alchemist's crucible. From this liberal margin we passed into the heart of the park, through a second lodge-gate, with weather-worn gilding on its twisted bars, to the smooth slopes where the great trees stood singly and the tame deer browsed along the bed of a woodland stream. Here, before us, we perceived the rich gray front of the Tudor-time, above its blooming parterres and terraces.

"Here you can wander all day," I said to

Searle, "like an exiled prince who has come back on tiptoe, hovering about the dominion of the usurper."

"To think of people having enjoyed this all these years!" he answered. "I know what I am, but what might I have been? What does all this make of a man?"

"That it makes him perfectly happy, independent of other things, I rather hesitate to believe," I said. "But it's hard to suppose that such a place has not some beneficent action of its own."

"What a perfect scene and background it forms!" Searle went on. "What legends, what histories it knows! My heart is breaking with unutterable visions. There's Tennyson's Talking Oak. What summer days one could spend here! How I could lounge the rest of my life away on this turf of the middle ages! Haven't I some maiden-cousin in that old hall, or grange, or court —what in the name of enchantment do you call it?—who would give me kind leave?" And then he turned almost fiercely upon me. "Why did you bring me here? Why did you drag me into this distraction of vain regrets?"

At this moment there passed within call a decent lad who had emerged from the gardens, and who might have been an underling in the stables. I hailed him and inquired whether we should be likely to gain admittance to the house. He answered that Mr. Searle was away from home, and that he thought it probable the housekeeper would consent to do the honours. I

passed my arm into Searle's. "Come," I said; "drain the cup, bitter-sweet though it be. We must go in." We passed another lodge-gate and entered the gardens. The house was an admirable production of some four hundred years ago: a multitudinous cluster of gables and porches, projections and recesses, brown old surfaces nestling under their ivy, and mottled roofs that testified not to seasons but to centuries. Two broad terraces commanded the great wooded horizon of the place. Our summons was answered by the butler in person. He repeated the assertion that Mr. Searle was away from home, and said he would present our petition to the housekeeper. We would be so good, however, as to give him our cards. This request, following so directly on the assertion that Mr. Searle was absent, was rather resented by my companion. "Surely not for the housekeeper," he said.

The butler gave a diplomatic cough. "Miss Searle is at home."

"Yours alone will suffice," said Searle. I took out a card and pencil, and wrote beneath my name, *New York*. As I stood with the pencil in my hand a temptation entered into it. Without in the least considering proprieties or results, I let the pencil obey, and added above my name the words, *Mr. Clement Searle*. What would come of it?

Before many minutes the housekeeper waited upon us—a fresh, rosy little old woman in a clean, dowdy cap and a scanty calico gown; an exquisite specimen of refined and venerable servility.

She had the accent of the country, but the manners of the house. Under her guidance we passed through a dozen apartments, duly stocked with old pictures, old tapestry, old carvings, old armour, with all the proper features of a great mansion. The pictures were especially valuable. The two Vandykes, the trio of rosy Rubenses, the sole and sombre Rembrandt, glowed with conscious authenticity. A Claude, a Murillo, a Greuze, a couple of Gainsboroughs, hung there with high complacency. Searle strolled about, scarcely speaking, pale and grave, with bloodshot eyes and lips compressed. He uttered no comment on what we saw, and asked but a question or two. Missing him, at last, from my side, I retraced my steps and found him in a room we had just left, on a tarnished silken divan, with his face buried in his hands. Before him, ranged on a great *crédence*, was a magnificent collection of old Italian majolica; plates of every shape, with their glaze of happy colour, jugs and vases nobly bellied and embossed. There seemed to rise before me, as I looked, a sudden vision of the young English gentleman who, eighty years ago, had travelled by slow stages to Italy and been waited on at his inn by persuasive toymen. "What is it, Searle?" I asked. "Are you unwell?"

He uncovered his haggard face and showed me a blush which I felt, I think, more than he. "A memory of the past! I was thinking of a china vase that used to stand on the parlour mantel-shelf when I was a boy, with a portrait of General Jackson painted on one side and

a bunch of flowers on the other! How long do you suppose that majolica has been in the family?"

"A long time probably. It was brought hither in the last century, into old, old England, out of old, old Italy, by some contemporary dandy who had a taste for foreign gimcracks. Here it has stood for a hundred years, keeping its clear, firm hues in this aristocratic twilight."

Searle sprang to his feet. "I say, in heaven's name, take me away! I can't stand this sort of thing. Before I know it I shall do something I shall be ashamed of. I shall steal some of their infernal crockery. I shall proclaim my identity and assert my rights! I shall go blubbering to Miss Searle and ask her in pity's name to keep me here for a month!"

If poor Searle could ever have been said to look dangerous, he looked so now. I began to regret my officious presentation of his name, and prepared without delay to lead him out of the house. We overtook the housekeeper in the last room of the suite, a small, unused boudoir, over whose chimney-piece hung a noble portrait of a young man in a powdered wig and a brocaded waistcoat. I was immediately struck with his resemblance to my companion.

"This is Mr. Clement Searle, Mr. Searle's great-uncle, by Sir Joshua Reynolds," quoth the housekeeper. "He died young, poor gentleman. He perished at sea, going to America."

"He's the young buck who brought the majolica out of Italy," I suggested.

"Indeed, sir, I believe he did," said the housekeeper, without any wonder.

"He's the image of you, Searle," I murmured.

"He's wonderfully like the gentleman, saving his presence," said the housekeeper.

My friend stood staring. "Clement Searle—at sea—going to America——" he muttered. Then harshly, to the housekeeper, "Why the devil did he go to America?"

"Why, indeed, sir? You may well ask. I believe he had kinsfolk there. It was for them to come to him."

Searle broke into a laugh. "It was for them to come to him! Well, well," he said, fixing his eyes on the little old woman, "they have come to him at last!"

She blushed like a wrinkled rose-leaf. "Indeed, sir," she said, "I verily believe that you are one of *us!*"

"My name is the name of that beautiful youth," Searle went on. "Dear kinsman, I salute you. Attend!" And he grasped me by the arm. "I have an idea! He perished at sea. His spirit came ashore and wandered about in misery till it got another incarnation—in this poor trunk!" And he tapped his hollow chest. "Here it has rattled about these forty years, beating its wings against its rickety cage, begging to be taken home again. And I never knew what was the matter with me! Now, at last, the poor spirit can escape!"

The housekeeper, very timorously, endeavoured to practise a smile. The scene was really embarrassing, and my confusion was not allayed

when I suddenly perceived in the doorway the figure of a lady. "Miss Searle!" whispered the housekeeper. My first impression of Miss Searle was that she was neither young nor beautiful. She stood, without confidence, on the threshold, pale, trying to smile, and twirling my card in her fingers. I immediately bowed. Searle stared at her as if one of the pictures had stepped out of its frame.

"If I am not mistaken, one of you gentlemen is Mr. Clement Searle," the lady said.

"My friend is Mr. Clement Searle," I replied. "Allow me to add that I alone am responsible for your having received his name."

"I should have been sorry not to—not to see him," said Miss Searle, beginning to blush. "Your being from America has led me to—to intrude upon you."

"The intrusion, madam, has been on our part. And with just that excuse—that we come from America."

Miss Searle, while I spoke, had fixed her eyes on my friend, as he stood silent beneath Sir Joshua's portrait. The housekeeper, amazed and mystified, suddenly took a liberty. "Heaven preserve us, Miss! It's your great-uncle's picture come to life."

"I am not mistaken, then," said Miss Searle. "We must be distantly related." She had the aspect of a thoroughly diffident woman — she was evidently embarrassed at having to make advances without help. Searle eyed her with gentle wonder from head to foot, and I could easily

read his thoughts. This, then, was Miss Searle, his maiden-cousin, prospective mistress of these hereditary treasures. She was a person of about thirty-five years of age, taller than most women, and full of a kind of slim robustness. She had a small gray eye, a considerable quantity of very light-brown hair, and a smiling, well-formed mouth. She was dressed in a lustreless black satin gown, with a short train. Around her neck she wore a blue silk handkerchief, and over this handkerchief, in many convolutions, a string of amber beads. Her appearance was singular; she was large, yet not imposing, girlish, yet mature. Her expression and tone, in addressing us, were very shy and simple. Searle, I think, had prefigured to himself some proud cold beauty of five-and-twenty; he was relieved at finding the lady timid and not obtrusively fair. His person was suddenly illumined with an old disused gallantry.

"We are distant cousins, I believe. I am happy to claim a relationship which you are so good as to remember. I had not counted on your knowing anything about me."

"Perhaps I have done wrong." And Miss Searle blushed and smiled anew. "But I have always known of there being people of our blood in America, and I have often wondered and asked about them; without learning much, however. To-day, when this card was brought me and I knew that a Clement Searle was wandering about the house like a stranger, I felt as if I ought to do something. But, you know, I hardly knew what! My brother is in London. I have done

what I think he would have done. Welcome, as a cousin." And with a gesture at once frank and hesitating, she put out her hand.

"I am welcome indeed," said Searle, taking it, "if he would have done it half so graciously."

"You have seen what there is, I think," Miss Searle went on. "Perhaps now you will have some lunch." We followed her into a small breakfast-room, where a deep bay window opened on the mossy flags of a great terrace. Here, for some moments, she remained dumb and abashed, in the manner of a person resting from an effort. Searle, too, was formal and reticent, so that I had to busy myself with providing conversation. It was of course easy to descant on the beauties of park and mansion, and as I did so I observed our hostess. She had no brilliancy of expression or manner; there was something meagre and provincial in her dress; yet she pleased me well. She had a sort of antique sweetness, a homely fragrance of old traditions. To be so simple, among those complicated treasures, so mellow and yet so fresh, so modest and yet so placid, told of just the spacious leisure in which Searle and I had imagined human life to be steeped in such places as that. Miss Searle was to the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood what a fact is to a fairy-tale, an interpretation to a myth. We, on our side, were to our hostess objects of a curiosity that was not artfully veiled.

"I should like so to go abroad!" she exclaimed suddenly, as if she meant us to take the speech for an expression of interest in ourselves.

"Have you never been?" I inquired.

"Only once. Three years ago my brother took me to Switzerland. We thought it extremely beautiful. Except for that journey, I have always lived here. I was born in this house. It's a dear old place, indeed, and I know it well. Sometimes one gets a little tired." And on my asking her how she spent her time and what society she saw, "Of course it's very quiet," she went on, proceeding by short steps and simple statements, in the manner of a person summoned for the first time to define her situation and enumerate the elements of her life. "We see very few people. I don't think there are many nice people hereabouts. At least we don't know them. Our own family is very small. My brother cares for little else but riding and books. He had a great sorrow ten years ago. He lost his wife and his only son, a dear little boy, who of course would have had everything. Do you know that that makes me the heir, as they have done something (I don't quite know what) to the entail? Poor me! Since his loss my brother has preferred to be quite alone. I am sorry he is away. But you must wait till he comes back. I expect him in a day or two." She talked more and more, with rambling eagerness, about her circumstances, her solitude, her bad eyes, so that she couldn't read, her flowers, her ferns, her dogs, and the vicar, recently presented to the living by her brother and warranted quite safe, who had lately begun to light his altar candles; pausing every now and then to blush in self-surprise, and yet moving steadily from point

to point in the deepening excitement of temptation and occasion. Of all the old things I had seen in England, this mind of Miss Searle's seemed to me the oldest, the quaintest, the most mellow; so fenced and protected by convention and precedent and usage, so passive and mild and docile. I felt as if I were talking with the heroine of a last-century novel. As she talked she rested her dull, kind eyes upon her kinsman with a sort of fascinated stare. At last, "Did you mean to go away without asking for us?" she inquired.

"I had thought it over, Miss Searle, and had determined not to trouble you. You have shown me how unfriendly I should have been."

"But you knew of the place being ours, and of our relationship?"

"Just so. It was because of these things that I came down here—because of them, almost, that I came to England. I have always liked to think of them."

"You merely wished to look, then? We don't pretend to be much to look at."

"You don't know what you are, Miss Searle," said my friend, gravely.

"You like the old place, then?"

Searle looked at her in silence. "If I could only tell you!" he said at last.

"Do tell me. You must come and stay with us."

Searle began to laugh. "Take care, take care!" he cried. "I should surprise you. I am afraid I should bore you. I should never leave you."

"Oh, you would get homesick—for America."

At this Searle laughed the more. "By the way, tell Miss Searle about America," he said to me. And he stepped, through the window, out upon the terrace, followed by two beautiful dogs, a pointer and a young stag-hound, who, from the moment we came in, had established the fondest relation with him. Miss Searle looked at him as he went, with a certain tender wonder in her eye; it began to be plain enough that she was interested in her curious cousin. I suddenly recalled the last words I had heard spoken by my friend's adviser in London, and which, in a very crude form, had reference to his making a match with this lady. If only Miss Searle could be induced to think of that, and if one had the tact to manipulate her a little! Something assured me that her heart was virgin-soil, that the flower of romantic affection had never bloomed there. If I could only sow the seed! There seemed to shape itself within her the perfect image of one of the patient wives of old.

"He has lost his heart to England," I said. "He ought to have been born here."

"And yet he doesn't look in the least an Englishman," said Miss Searle.

"Oh, it isn't his looks, poor fellow."

"Of course looks are not everything. I never talked with a foreigner before; but he talks as I have fancied foreigners."

"Yes, he is foreign enough."

"Is he married?"

"He is a widower—all alone in the world."

"Has he much property?"

"None to speak of."

"But he has means to travel about."

I meditated. "He has not expected to travel far," I said at last. "You know he is in very poor health."

"Poor gentleman! So I supposed."

"But he is better than he thinks. He came here because he wanted to see your place before he dies."

"Dear me—poor man!" And I thought I perceived in Miss Searle's eye the lustre of a rising tear. "And he was going away without my seeing him?"

"He is very modest, you see."

"He is very much of a gentleman."

"Assuredly!"

At this moment we heard on the terrace a loud, harsh cry. "It's the great peacock!" said Miss Searle, stepping to the window and passing out, while I followed her. Below us, leaning on the parapet, stood our appreciative friend, with his arm round the neck of the pointer. Before him, on the grand walk, strutted the familiar fowl of gardens—a splendid specimen—with ruffled neck and expanded tail. The other dog had apparently indulged in a momentary attempt to abash the gorgeous biped; but at Searle's voice he had bounded back to the terrace and leaped upon the ledge, where he now stood licking his new friend's face. The scene had a beautiful old-time air: the peacock flaunting in the foreground, like the genius of stately places; the broad terrace,

which flattered an innate taste of mine for all deserted promenades to which people may have adjourned from formal dinners, to drink coffee in old Sêvres, and where the stiff brocade of women's dresses may have rustled over grass or gravel; and far around us, with one leafy circle melting into another, the timbered acres of the park. "The very beasts have made him welcome," I said, as we rejoined our companion.

"The peacock has done for you, Mr. Searle," said his cousin, "what he does only for very great people. A year ago there came here a duchess to see my brother. I don't think that since then he has spread his tail as wide for any one else—not by a dozen feathers."

"It's not alone the peacock," said Searle. "Just now there came slipping across my path a little green lizard, the first I ever saw, the lizard of literature! And if you have a ghost, broad daylight though it be, I expect to see him here. Do you know the annals of your house, Miss Searle?"

"Oh dear, no! You must ask my brother for all those things."

"You ought to have a collection of legends and traditions. You ought to have loves and murders and mysteries by the roomful. I count upon it."

"Oh, Mr. Searle! We have always been a very well-behaved family. Nothing out of the way has ever happened, I think."

"Nothing out of the way? Oh, that won't do! We have managed better than that in America. Why, I myself!"—and he gazed at her

a moment with a gleam of malice, laughing at his idea. "Suppose I should turn out a better Searle than you—better than you, nursed here in romance and picturesqueness? Come, don't disappoint me. You have some history among you all, you have some poetry. I have been famished all my days for these things. Do you understand? Ah, you can't understand! Tell me something extraordinary. When I think of what must have happened here—of the lovers who must have strolled on this terrace and wandered under the beeches, of all the figures and passions and purposes that must have haunted these walls! of the births and deaths, the joys and sufferings, the young hopes and the old regrets, the rich experience of life——" And here he faltered a moment, with the increase of his agitation. The gleam in his eye, which I have called a gleam of malice, had settled into a deep, unnatural light. I began to fear he was really losing his head. But he went on, with redoubled passion. "To see it all called up there before me," he cried, "if the Devil alone could do it, I would make a bargain with the Devil! Oh, Miss Searle, I am a most unhappy man!"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said Miss Searle.

"Look at that window, that dear little window!" And he pointed to a small, protruding oriel, above us, relieved against the purple brick-work, framed in chiselled stone and curtained with ivy.

"It's my little room," said Miss Searle.

"Of course it's a woman's room. Think of all the dear faces—all of them so mild and yet so

proud—that have looked out of that lattice, and of all the old-time women's lives whose principal view of the world has been this quiet park! Every one of them was a cousin of mine. And you, Miss Searle, you are one of them yet." And he marched towards her and took her large white hand. She surrendered it, blushing to her eyes, and pressing her other hand to her breast. "You are a woman of the past. You are nobly simple. It has been a romance to see you. It doesn't matter what I say to you. You didn't know me yesterday, you will not know me to-morrow. Let me to-day do a mad, sweet thing. Let me fancy you to be the spirit of all the dead women who have trod these terrace-flags, which lie here like sepulchral tablets in the pavement of a church. Let me say I delight in you!" And he raised her hand to his lips. She gently withdrew it, and for a moment averted her face. Meeting her eyes the next moment, I saw that they were filled with tears. The Sleeping Beauty was awake.

There followed an embarrassed pause. An issue was suddenly presented by the appearance of the butler bearing a letter. "A telegram, Miss," he announced.

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried Miss Searle; "I can't open a telegram. Cousin, help me."

Searle took the missive, opened it, and read aloud: "*I shall be home to dinner. Keep the American.*"

II.

"KEEP the American!" Miss Searle, in compliance with the injunction conveyed in her brother's telegram (with something certainly of telegraphic curtness), lost no time in expressing the pleasure it would give her that my companion should remain. "Really you must," she said; and forthwith repaired to the housekeeper, to give orders for the preparation of a room.

"How in the world did he know of my being here?" asked Searle.

I answered that he had probably learned from his solicitor of the visit of your friend Simmons. "Simmons and the solicitor must have had another interview since your arrival in England," I said. "Simmons, for reasons of his own, has communicated to the solicitor your journey to this neighbourhood, and Mr. Searle, learning this, has immediately taken for granted that you have formally presented yourself to his sister. He is hospitably inclined, and he wishes her to do the proper thing by you. More, perhaps! I have my little theory that he is the very phœnix of usurpers, that he has been very much struck with what the legal people have had to say for you, and that he wishes to have the originality of making over to you your partial interest in the estate."

"I give it up!" said my friend, musing. "Come what come will!"

"You, of course," said Miss Searle, reappearing

and turning to me, "are included in my brother's invitation. I have told them to see about a room for you. Your luggage shall immediately be sent for."

It was arranged that I in person should be driven over to our little inn, and that I should return with our effects in time to meet Mr. Searle at dinner. On my arrival, several hours later, I was immediately conducted to my room. The servant pointed out to me that it communicated by a door and a private passage with that of my companion. I made my way along this passage —a low, narrow corridor, with a long, latticed casement, through which there streamed, upon a series of grotesquely sculptured oaken closets and cupboards, the lurid, animating glow of the western sun—knocked at his door, and, getting no answer, opened it. In an arm-chair by the open window sat my friend, sleeping, with arms and legs relaxed and head dropped on his breast. It was a great relief to find him resting from his rhapsodies, and I watched him for some moments before waking him. There was a faint glow of colour in his cheek and a light, expressive parting of the lips—something nearer to spiritual repose than I had yet seen in him. It was almost happiness, it was almost health. I laid my hand on his arm and gently shook it. He opened his eyes, gazed at me a moment, vaguely recognised me, then closed them again. "Let me dream, let me dream!" he said.

"What are you dreaming about?"

A moment passed before his answer came.

"About a tall woman in a quaint black dress, with yellow hair, and a sweet, sweet smile, and a soft, low, delicious voice! I am in love with her."

"It's better to see her than to dream about her," I said. "Get up and dress, and we shall go down to dinner and meet her."

"Dinner—dinner——" And he gradually opened his eyes again. "Yes, upon my word, I shall dine!"

"Oh, you are all right!" I said, as he rose to his feet. "You will live to bury Mr. Simmons." He told me that he had spent the hours of my absence with Miss Searle — they had strolled together over the park and through the gardens and green-houses. "You must be very intimate," I said, smiling.

"She is intimate with me," he answered. "Heaven knows what rigmarole I have treated her to!" They had parted an hour ago; since when, he believed, her brother had arrived.

The slow-fading twilight still abode in the great drawing-room as we entered it. The housekeeper had told us that this apartment was rarely used, there being others, smaller and more convenient, for the same needs. It seemed now, however, to be occupied in my comrade's honour. At the further end of it, rising to the roof, like a royal tomb in a cathedral, was a great chimney-piece of chiselled white marble, yellowed by time, in which a light fire was crackling. Before the fire stood a small, short man, with his hands behind him; near him was Miss Searle, so transformed by her dress that at first I scarcely knew her. There was in our

entrance and reception something remarkably chilling and solemn. We moved in silence up the long room, Mr. Searle advanced slowly, a dozen steps, to meet us, his sister stood motionless. I was conscious of her masking her visage with a large, white tinselled fan, and of her eyes, grave and expanded, watching us intently over the top of it. The master of Lockley Park grasped in silence the proffered hand of his kinsman, and eyed him from head to foot, suppressing, I think, a start of surprise at his resemblance to Sir Joshua's portrait. "This is a happy day," he said. And then turning to me with a curious little sharp stare, "My cousin's friend is my friend." Miss Searle lowered her fan.

The first thing that struck me in Mr. Searle's appearance was his very limited stature, which was less by half a head than that of his sister. The second was the preternatural redness of his hair and beard. They intermingled over his ears and surrounded his head like a huge lurid nimbus. His face was pale and attenuated, like the face of a scholar, a dilettante, a man who lives in a library, bending over books and prints and medals. At a distance it had an oddly innocent and youthful look; but on a nearer view it revealed a number of wrinkles, sharply etched and scratched, of a singularly aged and refined effect. It was the complexion of a man of sixty. His nose was arched and delicate, identical almost with the nose of my friend. His eyes, which were large and deep-set, had a kind of auburn glow, a vulpine keenness and redness, and were full of temper and spirit.

Imagine this physiognomy—grave and solemn in aspect, grotesquely solemn, in spite of the bushy brightness which made a sort of frame for it—set in motion by a queer, quick, defiant, perfunctory, preoccupied smile, and you will have an imperfect notion of the remarkable presence of our host; something better worth seeing and knowing, I perceived, as I covertly scrutinised him, than anything we had yet encountered. How thoroughly I had entered into sympathy with my companion, and how effectually I had associated my sensibilities with his, I had not suspected until, within the short five minutes which preceded the announcement of dinner, I became aware, without his giving me the least sign, that he was placing himself on the defensive. To neither of us was Mr. Searle sympathetic. I might have guessed from her attitude that his sister entered into our thoughts. A signal change had been wrought in her since the morning; during the hour, indeed (as I read in the light of the wondering glance he cast at her), that had elapsed since her parting with her cousin. She had not yet recovered from some great agitation. Her face was pale, her eyes were red with weeping. These tragic betrayals gave an unexpected dignity to her aspect, which was further enhanced by something complimentary and commemorative in her dress.

Whether it was taste or whether it was accident, I know not; but Miss Searle, as she stood there, half in the cool twilight, half in the arrested glow of the fire as it spent itself in the vastness of its marble cave, was a figure for a painter. She was

habited in some faded splendour of sea-green crape and silk, a piece of millinery which, though it must have witnessed a number of dull dinners, preserved still a festive air. Over her white shoulders she wore an ancient web of the most precious and venerable lace, and about her rounded throat a single circle of large pearls. I went in with her to dinner, and Mr. Searle, following with my friend, took his arm (as the latter afterwards told me) and pretended jocosely to conduct him. As dinner proceeded the feeling grew within me that a drama had begun to be played, in which the three persons before me were actors, each of a very difficult part. The part of my friend, however, seemed the most embarrassing, and I was filled with the desire that he should acquit himself with honour. I seemed to see him summon his shadowy faculties to obey his languid will. The poor fellow tried to take himself more seriously than he had done even in his best days. With Miss Searle, credulous, passive and pitying, he had finally flung aside all vanity and propriety, and shown the bottom of his fantastic heart. But with our host there might be no talking of nonsense nor taking of liberties; there and then, if ever, sat a consummate conservative, breathing the fumes of hereditary privilege and security. For an hour, accordingly, I saw my poor friend screw himself round, as it were, to take a new point of view. He set himself the task of appearing very American, in order that his appreciation of everything Mr. Searle represented might seem purely disinterested. What his kinsman had expected

him to be, I know not; but, with all his exaggerated urbanity, he was unable to repress a shade of annoyance at finding him so harmless. Mr. Searle was not the man to show his hand, but I think his best card had been a certain implicit confidence that this transatlantic parasite would hardly have good manners. Our host, with great delicacy, led the conversation to America, talking of it rather as if it were some fabled planet, alien to the British orbit, lately proclaimed indeed to have the admixture of atmospheric gases required to support animal life, but not, save under cover of a liberal afterthought, to be admitted into one's regular conception of things. I, for my part, felt nothing but regret that the spheric smoothness of his universe should be disfigured by the extrusion of even such inconsiderable particles as ourselves.

"I knew in a general way of my having relations in America," Mr. Searle said, "but you know one hardly realises those things. I could hardly more have imagined people of our blood there than I could have imagined being there myself. There was a man I knew at college, a very odd fellow, a nice fellow too; he and I were rather cronies; I think he afterwards went to America; to the Argentine Republic, I believe. Do you know the Argentine Republic? What an extraordinary name, by the way! And then, you know, there was that great-uncle of mine whom Sir Joshua painted. He went to America, but he never got there. He was lost at sea. You look enough like him to make one fancy he *did* get

there, and that you have kept him alive by one of those beastly processes—I think you have 'em over there: what do you call it, 'putting up' things? If you are he, you have not done a wise thing to show yourself here. He left a bad name behind him. There's a ghost who comes sobbing about the house every now and then, the ghost of one to whom he did a wrong."

"Oh, brother!" cried Miss Searle, in simple horror.

"Of course *you* know nothing of such things," said Mr. Searle. "You are too sound a sleeper to hear the sobbing of ghosts."

"I am sure I should like immensely to hear the sobbing of a ghost," said my friend, with the light of his previous eagerness playing up into his eyes. "Why does it sob? Do tell us all about it."

Mr. Searle eyed his audience for a moment, gaugingly; and then, as the French say, *se recueillit*, as if he were measuring his resources.

He wished to do justice to his theme. With the long finger-nails of his left hand nervously playing against the tinkling crystal of his wineglass, and his bright eye telling of a gleeful sense that, small and peculiar as he sat there, he was for the moment profoundly impressive, he distilled into our untutored minds the sombre legend of his house. "Mr. Clement Searle, from all I gather, was a young man of great talents but a weak disposition. His mother was left a widow early in life, with two sons, of whom he was the elder and the more promising. She educated him with

the greatest affection and care. Of course, when he came to manhood she wished him to marry well. His means were quite sufficient to enable him to overlook the want of means in his wife; and Mrs. Searle selected a young lady who possessed, as she conceived, every good gift save a fortune—a fine, proud, handsome girl, the daughter of an old friend, an old lover, I suspect, of her own. Clement, however, as it appeared, had either chosen otherwise or was as yet unprepared to choose. The young lady opened upon him in vain the battery of her attractions; in vain his mother urged her cause. Clement remained cold, insensible, inflexible. Mrs. Searle had a character which appears to have gone out of fashion in my family nowadays; she was what the French call a *maîtresse-femme*. A proud, passionate, imperious woman, she had had great cares and ever so many law-suits; they had sharpened her temper and her will. She suspected that her son's affections had another object, and this object she began to hate. Irritated by his stubborn defiance of her wishes, she persisted in her purpose. The more she watched him the more she believed that he loved in secret. If he loved in secret, of course he loved beneath him. He went about the place, sombre, sullen, brooding. At last, with the rashness of an angry woman, she threatened to bring the young lady of her choice—who, by the way, seems to have been no shrinking blossom—to stay in the house. A stormy scene was the result. He threatened that if she did so he would leave the country and sail for America. She probably

disbelieved him ; she knew him to be weak, but she overrated his weakness. At all events, the rejected one arrived and Clement Searle departed. On a dark December day he took ship at Southampton. The two women, desperate with rage and sorrow, sat alone in this big house, mingling their tears and imprecations. A fortnight later, on Christmas eve, in the midst of a great snowstorm, long famous in the country, something happened which quickened their bitterness. A young woman, soaked and chilled by the storm, gained entrance to the house and, making her way into the presence of the mistress and her guest, poured out her tale. She was a poor curate's daughter, out of some little hole in Gloucestershire. Clement Searle had loved her, loved her all too well. She had been turned out in wrath from her father's house ; his mother, at least, might pity her, if not for herself, then for the child she was soon to bring forth. The poor girl had been a second time too trustful. The women, in scorn, in horror, with blows, possibly, turned her forth again into the storm. In the storm she wandered, and in the deep snow she died. Her lover, as you know, perished in that hard winter-weather at sea ; the news came to his mother late, but soon enough. We are haunted by the curate's daughter !"

Mr. Searle related this anecdote in the tone of a very cultivated man, and when he ceased there was a pause of some moments. "Ah, well we may be !" said Miss Searle, with much emotion.

Searle blazed up into enthusiasm. "Of course

you know"—and suddenly he began to blush violently—"I should be sorry to claim any identity with my faithless namesake, poor fellow. But I shall be immensely gratified if the *revenant* should be deceived by my resemblance and mistake me for her cruel lover. She is welcome to the comfort of it. What one can do in the case I shall be glad to do. But can a ghost haunt a ghost? I *am* a ghost!"

Mr. Searle stared a moment, and then, with a subtle sneer, "I could almost believe you are!" he said.

"Oh, brother—cousin!" cried Miss Searle, with the gentlest, yet most appealing dignity; "how can you talk so horribly?"

This horrible talk, however, evidently possessed a potent magic for my friend; and his imagination, checked for a while by the influence of his kinsman, began to ferment and crepitate. From this moment he ceased to steer his cockle-shell, to care what he said or how he said it, so long as he expressed his passionate appreciation of the scene around him. As he talked I ceased even mentally to protest. I have wondered since that I should not have been annoyed by the way he reverted constantly to himself. But a great frankness, for the time, makes its own law, and a great passion its own channel. There was, moreover, a kind of irresponsible sweetness in everything that passed his lips. Free alike from either adulation or envy, the essence of his discourse was a divine apprehension, an imaginative mastery, free as the flight of Ariel, of the poetry of his companions'

situation and the contrasted prosiness of their attitude.

"How does the look of age come?" he suddenly inquired, at dessert. "Does it come of itself, unobserved, unrecorded, unmeasured? Or do you woo it and set baits and traps for it, and watch it like the dawning brownness of a meerschaum pipe, and make it fast, when it appears, just where it peeps out, and light a votive taper beneath it and give thanks to it daily? Or do you forbid it and fight it and resist it, and yet feel it settling and deepening about you, as irresistible as fate?"

"What the deuce is the man talking about?" said the smile of our host.

"I found a little gray hair this morning," Miss Searle remarked.

"Good heavens! I hope you respected it," cried Searle.

"I looked at it for a long time in my hand-glass," said his cousin, simply.

"Miss Searle for many years to come can afford to be amused at gray hairs," I interposed.

"Ten years from last Thursday I shall be forty-four," she answered.

"That's my age," said Searle. "If I had only come here ten years ago! I should have had more time to enjoy the feast, but I should have had less appetite. I needed to get famished for it."

"Why did you wait for the starving point?" asked Mr. Searle. "To think of these ten years that we might have been enjoying you!" And

at the thought of this wasted period Mr. Searle broke into a violent, nervous laugh.

"I always had a notion—a stupid, vulgar notion, if there ever was one—that to come abroad properly one ought to have a pot of money. My pot was too nearly empty. At last I came with my empty pot!"

Mr. Searle coughed, with an air of hesitation. "You are reduced—you are—a—straitened?"

My friend apparently was much amused at hearing his bleak situation depicted in semi-tones. "Reduced to nothing; straitened to the clothes on my back!"

"Upon my word!" murmured Mr. Searle, with an air of being divided between his sense of the indecency and his sense of the rarity of a gentleman taking just that tone about his affairs. "Well—well—well!" he added, in a voice which might have meant everything or nothing; and proceeded, in an inscrutable, humorous manner, to finish a glass of wine. His sparkling eye, as he drank, encountered mine over the top of his glass, and, for a moment, we exchanged a long, deep glance—a glance so penetrating as to leave a slight embarrassment on the face of each. "And you," said Mr. Searle, by way of carrying it off, "how about *your* wardrobe?"

"Oh, his!" cried my friend; "his wardrobe is immense. He could dress up a regiment!" He had drunk, I think, rather more champagne—I admit that the champagne was good—than was to have been desired in the interest of perfect self-control. He was rapidly drifting beyond

any tacit dissuasion of mine. A certain feverish rashness in his glance and voice warned me that to attempt to direct him would simply irritate him. As we rose from the table he caught my troubled look. Passing his arm for a moment into mine, "This is the great night!" he whispered. "The romantic, the fatal, the critical night!"

Mr. Searle had caused the whole lower portion of the house to be thrown open and a multitude of lights to be placed in convenient and effective positions. Such a marshalled wealth of ancient candlesticks and flambeaux I had never beheld. Niched against the dusky wainscots, casting great luminous circles upon the pendent stiffness of sombre tapestries, enhancing and completing with admirable effect the variety and mystery of the ancient house, they seemed to people the great rooms, as our little group passed slowly from one to another, with a dim, expectant presence. We had a delightful hour of it. Mr. Searle at once assumed the part of cicerone, and—I had not hitherto done him justice—Mr. Searle became almost agreeable. While I lingered behind with his sister, he walked in advance with his kinsman. It was as if he had said, "Well, if you want the old place, you shall have it—metaphysically!" To speak vulgarly, he rubbed it in. Carrying a tall silver candlestick in his left hand, he raised it and lowered it and cast the light hither and thither, upon pictures and hangings and carvings and cornices. Mr. Searle knew his house to perfection. He touched upon a hundred traditions and memories, and sketched very vividly

several figures of its earlier occupants. He told a dozen *historiettes* with remarkable art. His companion attended, with a sort of brooding intelligence. Miss Searle and I, meanwhile, were not wholly silent.

"I suppose that by this time you and your cousin are almost old friends," I remarked.

She trifled a moment with her fan, and then raising her kind little eyes: "Old friends, and at the same time strangely new! My cousin,—my cousin"—and her voice lingered on the word—"it seems so strange to call him my cousin, after thinking these many years that I had no cousin! He is really very odd!"

"It's not so much he as his circumstances that are odd," I ventured to say.

"I am so sorry for his circumstances. I wish I could help him in some way. He interests me so much." And here Miss Searle gave a sweet-sounding sigh. "I wish I had known him a long time ago. He told me that he is but the shadow of what he used to be."

I wondered whether Searle had been consciously practising upon the sensibilities of this gentle creature. If he had, I believed he had gained his point. But, in fact, his position had become to my sense so precarious that I hardly ventured to be glad. "His better self just now seems again to be taking shape," I said. "It will have been a good deed on your part if you help to restore him to all that he ought to be."

"Dear me, what can I do?"

"Be a friend to him. Let him like you, let

him love you! I daresay you see in him now much to pity and to wonder at. But let him simply enjoy awhile the grateful sense of your nearness and dearness. He will be a better and stronger man for it, and then you can love him, you can esteem him, without restriction."

Miss Searle listened with a pathetic little frown. "It's a hard part for poor stupid me to play!"

Her almost infantine gentleness left me no choice but to be absolutely frank. "Did you ever play any part at all?" I asked.

Her eyes met mine, wonderingly; she blushed, as if I had been reproaching her with her insignificance. "Never! I think I have hardly lived."

"You have begun to live now, perhaps. You have begun to care for something else than your old-fashioned habits. Excuse me if I seem rather meddlesome; you know we Americans are very rough. It's a great moment; I wish you joy!"

"I could almost believe you are laughing at me. I feel more trouble than joy."

"Why do you feel trouble?"

She paused, with her eyes fixed on our two companions. "My cousin's arrival is a great disturbance," she said at last.

"You mean that you did wrong in coming to meet him? In that case the fault is mine. He had no intention of giving you the opportunity."

"I did wrong, in a certain sense. But I can't find it in my heart to regret it. I never shall regret it! I did what I thought right and just. Heaven forgive me!"

"Heaven bless you, Miss Searle! Is any harm

to come of it? I did the evil; let me bear the brunt!"

She shook her head gravely. "You don't know my brother!"

"The sooner I do know him, then, the better." I could not help relieving myself (at least by the tone of my voice) of the antipathy with which, decidedly, this gentleman had inspired me. "Not perhaps that we should get on so well together!" And then, as she turned away—"Are you afraid of him?" I added.

She gave me a long shuddering sidelong glance. "He's looking at me!" she murmured.

He was standing with his back to us, holding a large Venetian hand-mirror, framed in chiselled silver, which he had taken from a shelf of antiquities, in just such a position that he caught the reflection of his sister's person. It was evident that I too was being supervised, and I determined I should not be suspected for nothing. "Miss Searle," I said, insisting upon her attention, "promise me something."

She turned upon me with a start and a glance which begged me to spare her. "Oh, don't ask me—please don't!" she cried. It was as if she were standing on the edge of a place where the ground had suddenly fallen away, and had been called upon to make a leap. I felt that retreat was impossible, and that it was the greater kindness to assist her to jump.

"Promise me," I repeated.

Still, with her eyes, she protested. "Oh, what a dreadful day!" she cried, at last.

"Promise me to let him speak to you, if he should ask you, any wish you may suspect on your brother's part notwithstanding."

She coloured deeply. "You mean," she said —"you mean that he—has something particular to say."

"Something very particular!"

"Poor cousin!"

"Well, poor cousin! But promise me."

"I promise," she said, and moved away across the long room and out of the door.

"You are in time to hear the most delightful story," said my friend, as I rejoined the two gentlemen. They were standing before an old sombre portrait of a lady in the dress of Queen Anne's time, with her ill-painted flesh-tints showing livid, in the candle-light, against her dark drapery and background. "This is Mrs. Margaret Searle —a sort of Beatrix Esmond—*qui se passait ses fantaisies.* She married a paltry Frenchman, a penniless fiddler, in the teeth of her whole family. Pretty Mrs. Margaret, you must have been a woman of courage! Upon my word, she looks like Miss Searle! Pray go on. What came of it all?"

Mr. Searle looked at his kinsman for a moment with an air of distaste for his boisterous homage and of pity for his crude imagination. Then resuming, with a very effective dryness: "I found a year ago, in a box of very old papers, a letter from Mrs. Margaret to a certain Cynthia Searle, her elder sister. It was dated from Paris and dreadfully ill-spelled. It contained a most pas-

sionate appeal for—a—for pecuniary assistance. She had just had a baby, she was starving, and dreadfully neglected by her husband; she cursed the day she left England. It was a most dismal production. I never heard that she found means to return."

"So much for marrying a Frenchman!" I said, sententiously.

Mr. Searle was silent for some moments. Then he remarked, "This is the only lady of the family who ever was taken in by an adventurer."

"Does Miss Searle know her history?" asked my friend, staring at the rounded whiteness of the heroine's cheek.

"Miss Searle knows nothing!" said our host, with expression.

"She shall know at least the tale of Mrs. Margaret," my friend returned; and he walked rapidly away in search of her.

Mr. Searle and I pursued our march through the lighted rooms. "You have found a cousin with a vengeance," I said, laughing.

"Ah, a vengeance?" my host repeated, stiffly.

"I mean that he takes as keen an interest in your annals and possessions as yourself."

"Oh, exactly so! He tells me he is an invalid," he added in a moment. "I should never have supposed it."

"Within the past few hours he is a changed man. Your beautiful house, your extreme kindness, have refreshed him immensely."

Mr. Searle uttered the vague ejaculation with which Englishmen of a certain class sometimes

recognise the concussion of any especial courtesy of speech. He bent his eyes on the floor, frowningly, and then, to my surprise, he suddenly stopped and looked at me with a penetrating eye. "I am an honest man!" he said. I was quite prepared to assent; but he went on, with a sort of fury of frankness, as if it were the first time in his life that he had opened himself to any one, as if the process were monstrous disagreeable, and he were hurrying through it as a task. "An honest man, mind you! I know nothing about Mr. Clement Searle! I never expected to see him. He has been to me a—a——" And here Mr. Searle paused to select a word which should vividly enough express what, for good or for ill, his kinsman had been to him. "He has been to me an *amazement!* I have no doubt he is a most amiable man. You will not deny, however, that he's a very odd sort of person. I am sorry he is ill. I am sorry he is poor. He is my fiftieth cousin. Well and good. I am an honest man. He shall not have it to say that he was not received at my house."

"He, too, thank heaven, is an honest man!" I said, smiling.

"Why the devil, then," cried Mr. Searle, turning almost fiercely upon me, "why the devil has he put forward this underhand claim to my property?"

This startling inquiry flashed backward a gleam of light upon the demeanour of our host and the suppressed agitation of his sister. In an instant the jealous soul of the unhappy gentleman revealed

itself. For a moment I was so surprised and scandalised at the directness of his attack that I lacked words to respond. As soon as he had spoken Mr. Searle appeared to feel that he had been wanting in form. "Excuse me, sir," he hurried on, "if I speak of this matter with heat. But I have been more disgusted than I can say on learning, as I learned this morning from my solicitor, the extraordinary proceedings of Mr. Clement Searle. Great heaven, sir, for what does the man take me? He pretends to the Lord knows what fantastic admiration for my place. Let him respect my place, then! Let him, with his tawdry parade of loyalty, imagine a tithe of what I feel! I love my estate; it's my passion, my conscience, my life! Am I to divide it up at this time of day with a beggarly foreigner, a man without means, without appearance, without proof, a pretender, a mountebank, a Bohemian! I thought America boasted that she had land for all men! Upon my soul, sir, I have never been so shocked in my life."

I paused for some moments before speaking, to allow his passion fully to expend itself and to flicker up again if it chose; for on my own part it seemed well that I should answer him once for all. "Your apprehensions, Mr. Searle," I said at last—"your terrors, I may call them—have fairly over-mastered your common sense. You are attacking a man of straw, a creature of unworthy illusion; though I am sadly afraid you have wounded a man of spirit and conscience. Either my friend has no valid claim on your estate, in

which case your agitation is superfluous; or he *has* a valid claim——"

Mr. Searle seized my arm and glared at me; his pale face paler still with the horror of my suggestion, his great sharp eyes flashing, and his strange red hair erect and quivering.

"A valid claim!" he shouted. "Let him try it—let him bring it into court!"

We had emerged into the great hall of the mansion and stood facing the main doorway. The door stood open into the portico, through whose stone archway I saw the garden glittering in the blue light of a full moon. As Mr. Searle uttered the words I have just repeated I beheld my companion come slowly up into the porch from without, bareheaded, bright in the outer moonlight, dark in the shadow of the archway, and bright again in the lamplight at the entrance of the hall. As he crossed the threshold the butler made his appearance at the head of the staircase on our left, faltering visibly a moment on seeing Mr. Searle; but then, perceiving my friend, he gravely descended. He bore in his hand a small silver tray. On the tray, gleaming in the light of the suspended lamp, lay a folded note. Clement Searle came forward, staring a little, and startled, I think, by some quick, nervous prevision of a catastrophe. The butler applied the match to the train. He advanced toward my friend, extending the salver and note. Mr. Searle made a movement as if to spring forward, but controlled himself. "Tottenham!" he shouted, in a strident voice.

"Yes, sir!" said Tottenham, halting.

"Stand where you are. For whom is that note?"

"For Mr. Clement Searle," said the butler, staring straight before him as if to discredit a suspicion of his having read the direction.

"Who gave it to you?"

"Mrs. Horridge, sir." This personage, I afterwards learned, was our friend the housekeeper.

"Who gave it Mrs. Horridge?"

There was on Tottenham's part just an infinitesimal pause before replying.

"My dear sir," broke in Searle, with his equilibrium completely restored by the crisis, "isn't that rather my business?"

"What happens in my house is my business; and mighty strange things seem to be happening." Mr. Searle had become so exasperated that I was afraid he would snatch Mrs. Horridge's missive. "Bring me the note!" he cried. The butler obeyed.

"Really, this is too much!" exclaimed my companion, affronted and helpless.

I was very angry. Before Mr. Searle had time to take the note I possessed myself of it. "If you have no regard for your sister," I said, "let a stranger, at least, act for her." And I tore the disputed document into a dozen pieces.

"In the name of decency, what does this horrid business mean?" Searle broke out.

Mr. Searle was about to open fire on him; but at this moment his sister appeared on the staircase, summoned evidently by our high-pitched, conten-

tious voices. She had exchanged her dinner-dress for a dark wrapper, removed her ornaments, and begun to disarrange her hair, a thick tress of which escaped from the comb. She hurried downward, with a pale, questioning face. Feeling distinctly that, for ourselves, immediate departure was in the air, and divining Mr. Tottenham to be a person of remarkable intuitions and extreme agility, I seized the opportunity to request him, *sotto voce*, to send a carriage to the door without delay. "And put up our things," I added.

Our host rushed at his sister and seized the white wrist which escaped from the loose sleeve of her dress. "What was in that note?" he demanded.

Miss Searle looked first at its scattered fragments and then at her cousin. "Did you read it?" she asked.

"No, but I thank you for it!" said Searle.

Her eyes for an instant communed brightly with his own; then she transferred them to her brother's face, where the light went out of them, leaving a dull, sad patience. But there was something even in her patience which seemed to him to mock him, so that he flushed crimson with rage and spite and flung her away. "You always were an idiot!" he cried. "Go to bed."

In poor Searle's face, as well, the gathered serenity was blighted and distorted, and the reflected brightness of his happy day turned to blank confusion. "Have I been dealing these three hours with a madman?" he inquired, very plaintively.

"A madman, yes, if you will! A man mad with the love of his home and the sense of its stability. I have held my tongue till now, but you have been too much for me. Who are you, what are you? From what paradise of fools do you come, that you fancy I shall cut off a piece of my land, my house, my heart, to toss to you? Forsooth, I shall share my property with you? Prove your preposterous claim! There isn't *that* in it!" And he kicked one of the bits of paper on the floor.

Searle received this broadside gaping. Then turning away, he went and seated himself on a bench against the wall and rubbed his forehead amazedly. I looked at my watch, and listened for the wheels of our carriage.

Mr. Searle went on in the same infuriated tone. "Wasn't it enough that you should have plotted against my property? Need you have come into my very house to intrigue with my sister?"

Searle put his two hands to his face. "Oh, oh, oh!" he groaned.

Miss Searle crossed rapidly and dropped on her knees at his side.

"Go to bed, you fool!" shrieked her brother.

"Dear cousin," said Miss Searle, "it's cruel that you are to have to think of us so!"

"Oh, I shall think of *you* as you would like," he said. And he laid a hand on her head.

"I believe you have done nothing wrong," she murmured.

"I have done what I could," her brother went on—"but it's arrant folly to pretend to friendship

when this abomination lies between us. You were welcome to my meat and my wine, but I wonder you could swallow them. The sight spoiled *my* appetite!" cried the insane little man, with a laugh. "Proceed with your case! My people in London are instructed and prepared."

"I have a fancy that your case has improved a good deal since you gave it up," I said to Searle.

"Oho! you don't feign ignorance, then?" and he shook his brilliant head at me. "It is very kind of you to give it up! Perhaps you will also give up my sister!"

Searle sat in his chair in a sort of collapse, staring at his adversary. "Ah, miserable man!" he moaned at last. "I fancied we had become such friends!"

"Boh, you hypocrite!" cried our host.

Searle seemed not to hear him. "Am I seriously expected," he pursued, slowly and painfully,—"am I seriously expected to sit here and defend myself—to prove I have done nothing wrong? Think what you please!" And he rose, with an effort, to his feet. "I know what *you* think!" he added, to Miss Searle.

The wheels of the carriage resounded on the gravel, and at the same moment a footman descended with our two portmanteaux. Mr. Tottenham followed him with our hats and coats.

"Good God," cried Mr. Searle, "you are not going away!" This ejaculation, under the circumstances, had the grandest comicality. "Bless my soul," he added artlessly, "of course you are going!"

"It's perhaps well," said Miss Searle, with a great effort, inexpressibly touching in one for whom great efforts were visibly new and strange, "that I should tell you what my poor little note contained."

"That matter of your note, madam," her brother broke in, "you and I will settle together!"

"Let me imagine its contents," Searle exclaimed.

"Ah! they have been too much imagined!" she answered, simply. "It was only a word of warning. It was to tell you to go. I knew something painful was coming."

Searle took his hat. "The pains and the pleasures of this day," he said to his kinsman, "I shall equally never forget. Knowing you," and he offered his hand to Miss Searle, "has been the pleasure of pleasures. I hoped something more was to come of it."

"A deal too much has come of it!" cried our host, irrepressibly.

Searle looked at him mildly, almost benignantly, from head to foot; and then closing his eyes with an air of sudden physical distress: "I am afraid so! I can't stand more of this." I gave him my arm, and we crossed the threshold. As we passed out I heard Miss Searle burst into a torrent of sobs.

"We shall hear from each other yet, I take it!" her brother went on, harassing our retreat.

Searle stopped and turned round on him sharply, almost fiercely. "You very ridiculous man!" he cried.

"Do you mean to say you will not prosecute?" shouted the other. "I shall force you to prose-

cute! I shall drag you into court, and you shall be beaten—beaten—beaten!" This grim participle continued to ring in our ears as we drove away.

We drove, of course, to the little wayside inn from which we had departed in the morning so unencumbered, in all broad England, with either enemies or friends. My companion, as the carriage rolled along, seemed utterly overwhelmed and exhausted. "What a dream!" he murmured stupidly. "What an awakening! What a long, long day! What a hideous scene! Poor me! Poor woman!" When we had resumed possession of our two little neighbouring rooms, I asked him, if Miss Searle's note had been the result of anything that had passed between them on his going to rejoin her. "I found her on the terrace," he said, "walking restlessly up and down in the moonlight. I was greatly excited; I hardly know what I said. I asked her, I think, if she knew the story of Margaret Searle. She seemed frightened and troubled, and she used just the words her brother had used, 'I know nothing.' For the moment, somehow, I felt as a man drunk. I stood before her and told her, with great emphasis, how poor Margaret had married a beggarly foreigner, in obedience to her heart and in defiance to her family. As I talked the sheeted moonlight seemed to close about us, and we stood there in a dream, in a world quite detached. She grew younger, prettier, more attractive—I found myself talking all kinds of nonsense. Before I knew it I had gone very far. I was taking her hand and calling her 'Margaret!' She had said that it was impossible,

that she could do nothing, that she was a fool, a child, a slave. Then, with a sudden sense—it was odd how it came over me there—of the reality of my connection with the place, I spoke of my claim against the estate. 'It exists,' I answered, 'but I have given it up. Be generous! Pay me for my sacrifice.' For an instant her face was radiant. 'If I marry you,' she asked, 'will it make everything right?' 'In our marriage, the whole difficulty will melt away like a rain-drop in the ocean,' I answered. 'Our marriage!' she repeated, wonderingly; and the deep ring of her voice seemed to wake us up and show us our folly. 'I love you, but I shall never see you again,' she cried; and she hurried away with her face in her hands. I walked up and down the terrace for some moments, and then came in and met you. This is the only witchcraft I have used!"

The poor fellow was at once so excited and so exhausted by the day's events, that I believed he would get little sleep. Conscious, on my own part, that I should not close my eyes, I but partly undressed, stirred my fire, and sat down to do some writing. I heard the great clock in the little parlour below strike twelve, one, half-past one. Just as the vibration of this last stroke was dying on the air, the door of communication into Searle's room was flung open, and my companion stood on the threshold, pale as a corpse, in his nightshirt, standing like a phantom against the darkness behind him. "Look at me!" he said, in a low voice, "touch me, embrace me, revere me! You see a man who has seen a ghost!"

"Great heaven, what do you mean?"

"Write it down!" he went on. "There, take your pen. Put it into dreadful words. How do I look? Am I human? Am I pale? Am I red? Am I speaking English? A ghost, sir! Do you understand?"

I confess there came upon me, by contact, a kind of supernatural shock. I shall always feel that I, too, have seen a ghost. My first movement —I can smile at it now—was to spring to the door, close it quickly, and turn the key upon the gaping blackness from which Searle had emerged. I seized his two hands; they were wet with perspiration. I pushed my chair to the fire and forced him to sit down in it; then I got on my knees and held his hands as firmly as possible. They trembled and quivered; his eyes were fixed, save that the pupil dilated and contracted with extraordinary force. I asked no questions, but waited there, very curious for what he would say. At last he spoke. "I'm not frightened, but I'm—oh, excited! This is life! This is living! My nerves —my heart—my brain! They are throbbing! Do you feel it? Do you tingle? Are you hot? Are you cold? Hold me tight—tight—tight! I shall tremble away into waves—into surges—and know all the secrets of things, and all the reasons, and all the mysteries!" He paused a moment, and then went on: "A woman—as clear as that candle—no, far clearer! In a blue dress, with a black mantle on her head, and a little black muff. Young and wonderfully pretty, pale and ill, with the sadness of all the women who ever loved and

suffered pleading and accusing in her wet-looking eyes. God knows I never did any such thing! But she took me for my elder, for the other Clement. She came to me here as she would have come to me there. She wrung her hands and she spoke to me. 'Marry me!' she moaned; 'marry me and put an end to my shame!' I sat up in bed, just as I sit here, looked at her, heard her—heard her voice melt away, watched her figure fade away. Bless us and save us! Here I am!"

I made no attempt either to explain my friend's vision or to turn it into ridicule. It is enough that I felt for the hour the contagion of his excitement. On the whole, I think my own vision was the more interesting of the two. He beheld but the transient, irresponsible spectre; I beheld the human subject, hot from the spectral presence. Nevertheless, I soon recovered my common sense sufficiently to feel the necessity of guarding my friend's health against the results of excitement and exposure. It was easily agreed that, for the night, he was not to return to his room; and I soon made him fairly comfortable in his place by the fire. Wishing above all to preserve him from a chill, I removed my bedding and wrapped him up in the blankets and counterpanes. I had no nerves either for writing or sleep; so I put out my lights, renewed the fire, and sat down on the opposite side of the hearth. I found a solemn entertainment in watching my friend. Silent, swathed and muffled to his chin, he sat rigid and erect with the dignity of his great adventure. For the most part his eyes were closed; though from

time to time he would open them, with a steady expansion, and look, without blinking, into the fire, as if he again beheld, without terror, the image of the little woman with the muff. With his cadaverous, emaciated face, his tragic wrinkles intensified by the upward glow from the hearth, his distorted moustache, his extraordinary gravity, and a certain fantastical air as the red light flickered over him, he looked like the vision-haunted knight of La Mancha, laid up after one of his exploits. The night passed wholly without speech. Towards its close I slept for half an hour. When I awoke the awakened birds had began to twitter, and Searle, unperturbed, sat staring at me. We exchanged a long look, and I felt with a pang that his glittering eyes had tasted their last of natural sleep. "How is it? are you comfortable?" I asked.

He looked at me for a long time without replying. Then he spoke with a kind of innocent grandiloquence, and with pauses between his words, as if an inner voice were slowly prompting him. "You asked me, when you first knew me, what I was. 'Nothing,' I said—'nothing of any consequence.' Nothing I have always supposed myself to be. But I have wronged myself. I am a great exception. I am a haunted man!"

If sleep had passed out of his eyes, I felt with a deeper pang that sanity had passed out of his voice. From this moment I prepared myself for the worst. There were in my friend, however, such confirmed habits of mildness that I did not fear he would prove unmanageable. As morning

began fully to dawn upon us I brought our curious vigil to a close. Searle was so weak that I gave him my hands to help him to get out of his chair; he retained them for some moments after rising to his feet, being apparently unable to keep his balance. "Well," he said, "I have seen one ghost, but I don't think I shall live to see another. I shall soon be myself as good a ghost as any of them. I shall haunt Mr. Searle! It can only mean one thing—that they are getting ready for me on the other side of the grave."

When I touched the question of breakfast he replied that he had his breakfast in his pocket; and he drew from his travelling-bag a phial of morphine. He took a strong dose and went to bed. At noon I found him on foot again, dressed, shaved, much refreshed. "Poor fellow," he said, "you have got more than you bargained for—not only a man with a grievance, but a man with a ghost. But it won't be for long." It immediately became a question, of course, whither we should now direct our steps.

"As I have so little time," Searle said, "I should like to see the best, the best alone." I answered that, either for time or eternity, I had supposed Oxford to be the best thing in England; and for Oxford in the course of an hour we accordingly departed.

Of this remarkable spot I shall not attempt to speak with any order, or indeed with any reason. It must long remain for an American one of the supreme gratifications of travel. The impression it produces, the emotions it kindles in the mind of

the western pilgrim, are too rich and various to be expressed in the halting rhythm of prose. Passing through the small, oblique streets in which the long gray, battered, public face of the colleges seems to be watching for noises that may break upon the stillness of study, you feel it to be the most dignified, the most educated, of cities. Over all of it, through all of it, the great corporate fact of the University slowly throbs, like some steady bass in a concerted piece, like the mediæval, mystical presence of the Empire in the old states of Germany. The plain perpendicular of the long street-fronts of the colleges—blessed seraglios of culture and leisure—irritates the imagination like the blank harem-walls of Eastern towns. Within their arching portals, however, you discover more sacred and sunless courts, and the dark verdure that bookish eyes like to rest upon. The gray-green quadrangles stand for ever open, with a trustful hospitality. The seat of the humanities is stronger in her own good manners than in a marshalled host of wardens and beadles. Directly after our arrival my friend and I wandered forth in the luminous early dusk. We reached the bridge which passes beneath the walls of Magdalen, and saw the eight-spired tower, delicately fluted and embossed, rise in temperate beauty—the perfect prose of Gothic—wooing the eyes to the sky, as it was slowly drained of day. We entered the low, monkish doorway and stood in the dim little court that nestles beneath the tower, where the swallows niche more lovingly in the tangled ivy than elsewhere in Oxford, and passed into the

quiet cloister, and studied the small sculptured monsters on the entablature of the arcade. I was pleased to see that Searle became extremely interested ; but I very soon began to fear that he would take Oxford too hard, as he took everything. I may say that from this time forward, with my unhappy friend, I found it difficult to distinguish between the play of fancy and the labour of thought, and to fix the balance between what he saw and what he imagined. He had already taken a fancy to mingle his identity with that of the earlier Clement Searle ; he now began to talk altogether in the character of his old-time kinsman.

"This was my college, you know," he said ; "the noblest in the whole place. How often I have walked up and down this cloister with the undergraduates of the last century ! My friends are all dead, but many a young fellow as we meet him, dark or fair, tall or short, reminds me of early attachments. Even Oxford, they say, feels about its massive base the murmurs of the tide of time ; some of the foundation-stones are loosened, some of the breaches will have to be repaired. Mine was the old unregenerate University, the home of rank abuses, of invidious distinctions and privileges. What cared I, who was a perfect gentleman, with my pockets full of money ? I had an allowance of two thousand a year."

It became evident to me, on the following day that he had lost the little that remained of his strength, and that he was unequal to the effort of regular sight-seeing. He read my apprehension in my eyes, and took pains to assure me that

I was right. "I am going down hill. Thank heaven, it's an easy slope, coated with English turf and with an English churchyard at the foot." The hysterical emotion produced by our adventure at the home of the Searles had given place to an unruffled resignation, in which the scene around us was reflected as in an old-fashioned mirror. We took an afternoon walk through Christ-Church meadow, and at the river-bank procured a boat, which I pulled down the stream to Iffley and to the slanting woods of Nuneham—the sweetest, flattest, reediest stream-side landscape that could be desired. Here, of course, we encountered in hundreds the young, the happy generation, clad in white flannel and blue, muscular, fair-haired, magnificent, fresh, lounging down the current in their idle punts, in friendly couples or in a singleness that nursed ambitions; or pulling in straining crews and hoarsely exhorted from the near bank. When, in conjunction with all this beautiful physical life, you think of the lawns and bowers, the perfumed privacy of the college-gardens, you cannot but hold that to be young in this incomparable country is to be doubly—infinitely—blessed. As my companion found himself less and less able to walk, we repaired to these scholastic shades, and spent long hours sitting in their greenest places. They struck us as the fairest things in England and the ripest and sweetest fruit of the English system. Locked in their antique verdure, guarded (as in the case of New College) by gentle battlements of silver-gray, outshouldering the matted leafage of unrecorded plants, filled with

nightingales and memories—a sort of hum of tradition; with students lounging bookishly on the turf (as if to spare it the injury of their boot-heels), and with the great conservative presence of the college-front appealing gravely from the restless outer world, they seem places to lie down on the grass in for ever, in the happy faith that life is all a green old English garden, and time an endless English afternoon. This charmed seclusion was especially grateful to my friend, and his sense of it reached its climax, I remember, on the last afternoon of our three, as we sat, in fascinated *flânerie*, in the spacious garden of St. John's. The long face of the college here perhaps broods over the lawn with a more effective air of property than elsewhere. Searle dropped into fitful talk and spun his fancies into golden figures. Every collegian who passed us was the subject of an extemporised romance, and every feature of the place the theme of a lyric rhapsody.

"Isn't it all a delightful lie?" he demanded. "Mightn't one fancy this the very central point of the world's heart, where all the echoes of the world's life arrive only to falter and die? Listen! the air is thick with arrested voices. It is well there should be such places, shaped in the interest of factitious needs, invented to minister to the book-begotten longing for a medium in which one may dream unwaked and believe unconfuted; to foster the sweet illusion that all is well in this weary world, all perfect and rounded, mellow and complete, in this sphere of the pitiful unachieved

and the dreadful uncommenced. The world's made—work's over. Now for leisure! England's safe! Now for Theocritus and Horace, for lawn and sky! What a sense it all gives one of the composite life of England, and how essential a factor of the educated British consciousness one omits in not thinking of such a place! Thank heaven, they had the wit to send me here in the other time. I am not much with it, perhaps; but what should I have been without it? The misty spires and towers of Oxford, seen far off on the level, have been all these years one of the constant things of memory. Seriously, what does Oxford do for these people? Are they wiser, gentler, richer, cleverer? At moments when its massive influence surges into my mind like a tidal wave, I take it as a sort of affront to my dignity. My soul reverts to the naked background of our own education, the dead white wall before which we played our meagre little parts. I assent to it all with a sort of desperate calmness; I accept it with a dogged pride. We are nursed at the opposite pole. Naked come we into a naked world. There is a certain grandeur in the absence of decorations, a certain heroic strain in those young imaginations of the West, which find nothing made to their hands, which have to invent their own traditions and raise high into our morning-air, with a ringing hammer and nails, the castles in which they dwell. *Noblesse oblige* — Oxford obliges. What a horrible thing not to respond to such obligations! If you pay the pious debt to the last farthing of interest, you may go through

life with her blessing; but if you let it stand unhonoured, you are a worse barbarian than we! But for the better or worse, in a myriad private hearts, think how she must be loved! How the youthful sentiment of mankind seems visibly to brood upon her! Think of the young lives now taking colour in her cloisters and halls. Think of the centuries' tale of dead lads—dead alike with the end of the young days to which these haunts were a present world, and the close of the larger lives which the general mother-scene has dropped into less bottomless traps. What are those two young fellows kicking their heels over on the grass there? One of them has the *Saturday Review;* the other—upon my soul—the other has Artemus Ward! Where do they live, how do they live, to what end do they live? Miserable boys! How can they read Artemus Ward under those windows of Elizabeth? What do you think loveliest in all Oxford? The poetry of certain windows. Do you see that one yonder, the second of those lesser bays, with the broken cornice and the lattice? That used to be the window of my bosom friend, a hundred years ago. Remind me to tell you the story of that broken cornice. Don't tell me it's not a common thing to have one's bosom friend at another college. Pray, was I committed to common things? He was a charming fellow. By the way, he was a good deal like you. Of course his cocked hat, his long hair in a black ribbon, his cinnamon velvet suit, and his flowered waistcoat made a difference! We gentlemen used to wear swords."

There was something really artistic in my poor

friend's divagations; the disheartened dandy had turned rhapsodist and seer. I was particularly struck with his having laid aside the diffidence and self-consciousness which had marked him during the first days of our acquaintance. He was becoming more and more a disembodied observer and critic; the shell of sense, growing daily thinner and more transparent, transmitted the tremor of his quickened spirit. He revealed an unexpected faculty for becoming acquainted with the lounging gownsmen whom we met in our vague peregrinations. If I left him for ten minutes I was sure to find him, on my return, in earnest conversation with some affable wandering scholar. Several young men with whom he had thus established relations invited him to their rooms and entertained him, as I gathered, with boisterous hospitality. For myself, I chose not to be present on these occasions; I shrank partly from being held in any degree responsible for his extravagance, partly from seeing him get worse under the pressure—applied without scruple by the juvenile class—of champagne and an admiring circle. He reported these adventures with less eloquence than I had supposed he might use; but, on the whole, I suspect that a certain method in his madness, a certain dignity in his desire to fraternise, had ensured him perfect respect. If they didn't think him a lunatic they certainly thought him a celebrity of the Occident. Two things, however, became evident—that he drank more champagne than was good for him, and that the boyish grossness of his entertainers tended rather, on re-

flection, to disturb in his mind the pure image of Oxford. At the same time it completed his knowledge of the place. Making the acquaintance of several tutors and fellows, he dined in hall in half-a-dozen colleges, and alluded afterwards to these banquets with a sort of religious unction. One evening, after a symposium indiscreetly prolonged, he came back to the hotel in a cab, accompanied by a friendly student and a physician, looking deadly pale. He had swooned away on leaving table, and had remained so rigidly unconscious as to excite great alarm among his companions. The following twenty-four hours, of course, he spent in bed; but on the third day he declared himself strong enough to go out. On reaching the street his strength again forsook him, and I insisted upon his returning to his room. He besought me with tears in his eyes not to shut him up. "It's my last chance," he said. "I want to go back for an hour to that garden of St. John's. Let me eat and drink; to-morrow I die." It seemed to me possible that with a Bath-chair the expedition might be accomplished. The hotel, it appeared, possessed such a convenience, and it was immediately produced. It became necessary hereupon that we should have a person to propel the chair. As there was no one on the spot at liberty, I prepared to perform the office; but just as Searle had got seated and wrapped (he now had a perpetual chill) an elderly man emerged from a lurking-place near the door, and, with a formal salute, offered to wait upon the gentleman. We assented, and he proceeded

solemnly to trundle the chair before him. I recognised him as an individual whom I had seen lounging shyly about the doors of the hotels, at intervals during our stay, with a depressed air of wanting employment and a poor prospect of finding any. He had once indeed, in a half-hearted way, proposed himself as an amateur cicerone for a tour through the colleges; and I now, as I looked at him, remembered with a pang that I had declined his services a little ungraciously. Since then his shyness, apparently, had grown less or his misery greater; for it was with a strange, grim avidity that he now attached himself to our service. He was a pitiful image of shabby gentility and the dinginess of "reduced circumstances." To describe him in the slang of our native land, he was a "dead-beat." He was, I suppose, some fifty years of age; but his pale, haggard, unwholesome visage, his plaintive, drooping carriage, and the irremediable decay of his apparel, seemed to add to the burden of his days and tribulations. His eyes were bloodshot and weak-looking, his handsome nose had assumed a tinge, and his reddish beard, largely streaked with gray, bristled with a month's desperate indifference to the razor. In all this rusty forlornness there lurked a visible assurance of our friend's having known better days. Obviously, he was the victim of some fatal depreciation in the market-value of pure gentility. There had been something terribly pathetic in the way he fiercely merged the attempt to touch the greasy rim of his antiquated hat into such a bow as one man of

the world might make to another. Exchanging a few words with him as we went along, I was struck with the superiority of his accent.

"Take me by some long, roundabout way," said Searle, "so that I may see as many college-walls as possible."

"You can wander without losing your way?" I asked of our attendant.

"I ought to be able to, sir," he said, after a moment, with pregnant gravity. And as we were passing one of the colleges, "That used to be my place, sir," he added.

At these words Searle commanded him to stop and come and stand in front of him. "You say that is *your* college?" he demanded.

"My college might deny me, sir; but heaven forbid I should deny my college. If you will allow me to take you into the quad, I will show you my windows, thirty years ago!"

Searle sat staring, with his huge, pale eyes, which now had come to usurp the greatest place in his wasted visage, filled with wonder and pity. "If you will be so kind," he said with immense politeness. But just as this perverted product of a liberal education was about to propel him across the threshold of the court, he turned about, disengaged his hands, with his own hand, from the back of the chair, drew him alongside of him and turned to me. "While we are here, my dear fellow," he said, "be so good as to perform this service. You understand?" I gave our companion a glance of intelligence, and we resumed our way. The latter showed us his window of

thirty years ago, where now a rosy youth in a scarlet smoking-fez was puffing a cigarette in the open casement. Thence we proceeded into the little garden, the smallest, I believe, and certainly the sweetest, of all the planted places of Oxford. I pushed the chair along to a bench on the lawn, wheeled it about toward the front of the college, and sat down on the grass. Our attendant shifted himself mournfully from one foot to the other; Searle eyed him, open-mouthed. At length the latter broke out, "God bless my soul, sir, you don't suppose that I expect you to stand! There's an empty bench."

"Thank you," said our friend, bending his joints to sit.

"You English are really fabulous! I don't know whether I most admire you or abhor you! Now tell me: who are you? what are you? what brought you to this?"

The poor fellow blushed up to his eyes, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead with a ragged handkerchief. "My name is Rawson, sir. Beyond that, it's a long story."

"I ask out of sympathy," said Searle. "I have a fellow-feeling! You are a poor devil; I am a poor devil too."

"I am the poorer devil of the two," said the stranger, with a little emphatic nod of the head.

"Possibly. I suppose an English poor devil is the poorest of all poor devils. And then, you have fallen from a height. From a gentleman commoner (is that what they called you?) to a

Bath-chair man! Good heavens, man, the fall's enough to kill you!"

"I didn't take it all at once, sir. I dropped a bit one time and a bit another."

"That's me, that's me!" cried Searle, with great seriousness.

"And now," said our friend, "I believe I can't drop any further."

"My dear fellow," and Searle clasped his hand and shook it, "I too am at the very bottom of the hole."

Mr. Rawson lifted his eyebrows. "Well, sir, there's a difference between sitting in a Bath-chair and walking behind it!"

"Oh, I am at my last gasp, Mr. Rawson."

"I am at my last penny, sir."

"Literally, Mr. Rawson?"

Mr. Rawson shook his head, with a world of vague bitterness. "I have almost come to the point of drinking my beer and buttoning my coat figuratively; but I don't talk in figures," he said.

Fearing that the conversation had taken a turn which might seem to cast a rather fantastic light upon Mr. Rawson's troubles, I took the liberty of asking him, with all consideration, how he made a living.

"I don't make a living," he answered, with tearful eyes; "I can't make a living. I have a wife and three children, starving, sir. You wouldn't believe what I have come to. I sent my wife to her mother's, who can ill afford to keep her, and came to Oxford a week ago, thinking I might pick up a few half-crowns by showing people

about the colleges. But it's no use. I haven't the assurance. I don't look decent. They want a nice little old man with black gloves, and a clean shirt, and a silver-headed stick. What do I look as if I knew about Oxford, sir?"

"Dear me," cried Searle, "why didn't you speak to us before?"

"I wanted to; half a dozen times I have been on the point of it. I knew you were Americans."

"And Americans are rich!" cried Searle, laughing. "My dear Mr. Rawson, American as I am, I am living on charity."

"And I am not, sir! There it is. I am dying for the want of charity. You say you're a pauper; it takes an American pauper to go bowling about in a Bath-chair. America's an easy country."

"Ah me!" groaned Searle. "Have I come to the most delicious corner of the ancient world to hear the praise of Yankeeland?"

"Delicious corners are very well, and so is the ancient world," said Mr. Rawson; "but one may sit here hungry and shabby, so long as one isn't too shabby, as well as elsewhere. You'll not persuade me that it's not an easier thing to keep afloat yonder than here. I wish I were in Yankeeland, that's all!" added Mr. Rawson, with feeble force. Then brooding for a moment on his wrongs: "Have you a brother? or you, sir? It matters little to you. But it has mattered to me with a vengeance! Shabby as I sit here, I have a brother with his five thousand a year. Being a couple of years my senior, he gorges while I starve. There's old England for you! A very pretty place for *him!*"

"Poor old England!" said Searle, softly.

"Has your brother never helped you?" I asked.

"A twenty-pound note now and then! I don't say that there have not been times when I have sorely tried his generosity. I have not been what I should. I married dreadfully out of the way. But the devil of it is that he started fair and I started foul; with the tastes, the desires, the needs, the sensibilities of a gentleman—and nothing else! I can't afford to live in England."

"This poor gentleman fancied a couple of months ago that he couldn't afford to live in America," I said.

"I would change chances with him!" And Mr. Rawson gave a passionate slap to his knee.

Searle reclined in his chair, with his eyes closed and his face twitching with violent emotion. Suddenly he opened his eyes with a look of awful gravity. "My friend," he said, "you're a failure! Be judged! Don't talk about chances. Don't talk about fair starts and false starts. I'm at that point myself that I have a right to speak. It lies neither in one's chance nor one's start to make one a success; nor in anything one's brother can do or can undo. It lies in one's will. You and I, sir, have had none; that's very plain! We have been weak, sir; as weak as water. Here we are, sitting staring in each other's faces and reading our weakness in each other's eyes. We are of no importance whatever, Mr. Rawson!"

Mr. Rawson received this sally with a countenance in which heartfelt conviction was oddly mingled with a vague suspicion that a proper

self-respect required him to resent its unflattering candour. In the course of a minute a proper self-respect yielded to the warm, comfortable sense of his being understood, even if he didn't gain by it. "Go on, sir, go on," he said. "It's wholesome truth." And he wiped his eyes with his dingy handkerchief.

"Dear me!" cried Searle. "I have made you cry. Well! we speak as from man to man. I should be glad to think that you had felt for a moment the side-light of that great undarkening of the spirit which precedes—which precedes the grand illumination of death."

Mr. Rawson sat silent for a moment, with his eyes fixed on the ground and his well-cut nose more deeply dyed by his agitation. Then at last, looking up: "You're a very good-natured man, sir; and you'll not persuade me that you don't come of a good-natured race. Say what you please about a chance; when a man is fifty—degraded, penniless, a husband and father—a chance to get on his legs again is not to be despised. Something tells me that my chance is in your country—that great home of last chances. I can starve here, of course; but I don't want to starve. Hang it, sir, I want to live! I see thirty years of life before me yet. If only, by God's help, I could spend them there! It's a fixed idea of mine. I have had it for the last ten years. It's not that I am a radical. Oh, I have no opinions! Old England's good enough for me, but I am not good enough for old England. I am a shabby man that wants to get out of a room full of staring gentlefolks. I am for ever put to

the blush. It's a perfect agony of spirit. Everything reminds me of my younger and better self. Oh, for a cooling, cleansing plunge into the unknowing and the unknown! I lie awake thinking of it."

Searle closed his eyes, shivering with a long-drawn tremor which I hardly knew whether to take for an expression of physical or of mental pain. In a moment I perceived it was neither. "Oh, my country, my country, my country!" he murmured, in a broken voice; and then sat for some time abstracted and depressed. I intimated to our companion that it was time we should bring our little session to a close, and he, without hesitating, possessed himself of the handle of the Bath-chair and pushed it before him. We had got half-way home before Searle spoke or moved. Suddenly in the High Street, as we passed a chop-house, from whose open doors there proceeded an aroma of old-fashioned cookery, and other restorative things, he motioned us to halt. "This is my last five pounds," he said, drawing a note from his pocket-book. "Do me the favour, Mr. Rawson, to accept it. Go in there and order the best dinner they can give you. Order a bottle of Burgundy and drink it to my eternal rest!" Mr. Rawson stiffened himself up and received the gift with fingers momentarily irresponsive. But Mr. Rawson had the nerves of a gentleman. I saw the titillation of his pointed finger-tips as they closed upon the crisp paper, I noted the fine tremor in his empurpled nostril as it became more deeply conscious of the savoury character of the

establishment. He crushed the crackling note in his palm with a convulsive pressure.

"It shall be the yellow seal!" he said, jerking a spasmodic bow. The next moment the door swung behind him.

Searle relapsed into his feeble stupor, and on reaching the hotel I helped him to get to bed. For the rest of the day he lay in a half-somnolent state, without motion or speech. The doctor, whom I had constantly in attendance, declared that his end was near. He expressed great surprise that he should have lasted so long; he must have been living for a month on the very dregs of his strength. Toward evening, as I sat by his bedside in the deepening dusk, he aroused himself with a purpose which I had vaguely felt gathering beneath his quietude. "My cousin, my cousin," he said, confusedly. "Is she here?" It was the first time he had spoken of Miss Searle since our exit from her brother's house. "I was to have married her," he went on. "What a dream! That day was like a string of verses—rhymed hours. But the last verse is bad measure. What's the rhyme to 'love'? *Above!* Was she a simple woman, a sweet woman? Or have I dreamed it? She had the healing gift; her touch would have cured my madness. I want you to do something. Write three lines, three words: 'Good-bye; remember me; be happy.'" And then, after a long pause: "It's strange a person in my condition should have a wish. Why should one eat one's breakfast the day one is hanged? What a creature is man! What a farce is life! Here I lie, worn down to a

mere throbbing fever-point; I breathe and nothing more, and yet I *desire!* My desire lives. If I could see her! Help me out with it and let me die."

Half an hour later, at a venture, I despatched a note to Miss Searle: "*Your cousin is rapidly sinking. He asks to see you.*" I was conscious of a certain unkindness in doing so. It would bring her great trouble, and no power to face the trouble; but out of her distress I fondly hoped a sufficient energy might be born. On the following day my friend's exhaustion had become so great that I began to fear that his intelligence was altogether gone. But towards evening he rallied awhile, and talked in a maundering way about many things, confounding in a sinister jumble the memories of the past weeks and those of bygone years. "By the way," he said suddenly, "I have made no will. I haven't much to bequeath. Yet I have something." He had been playing listlessly with a large signet-ring on his left hand, which he now tried to draw off. "I leave you this," working it round and round vainly, "if you can get it off. What enormous knuckles! There must be such knuckles in the mummies of the Pharaohs. Well, when I am gone! No, I leave you something more precious than gold—the sense of a great kindness. But I have a little gold left. Bring me those trinkets." I placed on the bed before him several articles of jewelry, relics of early foppery: his watch and chain, of great value, a locket and seal, some odds and ends of goldsmith's work. He trifled with them feebly for some moments, murmuring various names and dates associ-

ated with them. At last, looking up with a sudden energy, "What has become of Mr. Rawson?"

"You want to see him?"

"How much are these things worth?" he asked, without heeding me. "How much would they bring?" And he held them up in his weak hands. "They have a great weight. Two hundred pounds? I am richer than I thought! Rawson—Rawson —you want to get out of this awful England?"

I stepped to the door and requested the servant whom I kept in constant attendance in the adjoining sitting-room, to send and ascertain if Mr. Rawson were on the premises. He returned in a few moments, introducing our shabby friend. Mr. Rawson was pale, even to his nose, and, with his suppressed agitation, had an air of great distinction. I led him up to the bed. In Searle's eyes, as they fell on him, there shone for a moment the light of a human message.

"Lord have mercy!" said Mr. Rawson, fervently.

"My friend," said Searle, "there is to be one American the less. Let there be one the more. At the worst you will be as good a one as I. Foolish me! Take these battered relics; you can sell them; let them help you on your way. They are gifts and mementoes, but this is a better use. Heaven speed you! May America be kind to you. Be kind, at the last, to your own country!"

"Really, this is too much; I can't," the poor man protested, in a tremulous voice. "Do get well, and I will stop here. I will stay with you and wait on you."

"No, I am booked for my journey, you for yours. I hope you don't suffer at sea."

Mr. Rawson exhaled a groan of helpless gratitude, appealing piteously from so awful a good fortune. "It's like the angel of the Lord, who bids people in the Bible to rise and flee!"

Searle had sunk back upon his pillow, quite used up; I led Mr. Rawson back into the sitting-room, where in three words I proposed to him a rough valuation of our friend's trinkets. He assented with perfect good-breeding; they passed into my possession and a second bank-note into his.

From the collapse into which this beneficent interview had plunged him Searle gave few signs of being likely to emerge. He breathed, as he had said, and nothing more. The twilight deepened; I lighted the night-lamp. The doctor sat silent and official at the foot of the bed; I resumed my constant place near the head. Suddenly Searle opened his eyes wide. "She will not come," he murmured. "Amen! she's an English sister." Five minutes passed; he started forward. "She has come, she is here!" he whispered. His words conveyed to my mind so absolute an assurance that I lightly rose and passed into the sitting-room. At the same moment, through the opposite door, the servant introduced a lady. A lady, I say; for an instant she was simply such; tall, pale, dressed in deep mourning. The next instant I had uttered her name—"Miss Searle!" She looked ten years older.

She met me, with both hands extended, and

an immense question in her face. "He has just spoken your name," I said. And then, with a fuller consciousness of the change in her dress and countenance: "What has happened?"

"Oh, death, death!" said Miss Searle. "You and I are left."

There came to me with her words a sort of sickening shock, the sense of poetic justice having been shuffled away. "Your brother?" I demanded.

She laid her hand on my arm, and I felt its pressure deepen as she spoke. "He was thrown from his horse, in the park. He died on the spot. Six days have passed.—Six months!"

She took my arm. A moment later we had entered the room and approached the bedside, while the doctor withdrew. Searle opened his eyes and looked at her from head to foot. Suddenly he seemed to perceive her mourning. "Already!" he cried, audibly; with a smile, as I believe, of pleasure.

She dropped on her knees and took his hand. "Not for you, cousin," she whispered. "For my poor brother."

He started, in all his deathly longitude, as with a galvanic shock. "Dead! *he* dead! Life itself!" And then, after a moment, with a slight rising inflection: "You are free?"

"Free, cousin. Sadly free. And now—*now*—with what use for freedom?"

He looked steadily a moment into her eyes, dark in the heavy shadow of her musty mourning veil. "For me wear colours!" he said.

In a moment more death had come, the doctor had silently attested it, and Miss Searle had burst into sobs.

We buried him in the little churchyard in which he had expressed the wish to lie; beneath one of the blackest and widest of English yews and the little tower than which none in all England has a softer and hoarier gray. A year has passed; Miss Searle, I believe, has begun to wear colours.

1871.

ROSE-AGATHE.

I HAD invited the excellent fellow to dinner, and had begun to wonder, the stroke of half-past six having sounded, why he did not present himself. At last I stepped out upon the balcony and looked along the street in the direction from which, presumably, he would approach. A Parisian thoroughfare is always an entertaining spectacle, and I had still much of a stranger's alertness of attention. Before long, therefore, I quite forgot my unpunctual guest in my relish of the multifarious animation of the brilliant city. It was a perfect evening, toward the end of April; there was a charming golden glow on the opposite house-tops, which looked toward the west; there was a sort of vernal odour in the street, mingling with the emanations of the restaurant across the way, whose door now always stood open; with the delightful aroma of the chocolate-shop which occupied the ground floor of the house in whose *entresol* I was lodged; and, as I fancied, with certain luscious perfumes hovering about the brilliantly-polished window of the hairdresser's establishment, adjacent to the restaurant. It had above it the sign, "Anatole, Coiffeur;" these artists, in Paris, being known only by their Christian name.

Then there was a woman in a minutely-fluted cap, selling violets in a little handcart which she gently pushed along over the smooth asphalte, and which, as she passed, left a sensible trace in the thick, mild air. All this made a thoroughly Parisian mixture, and I envied Sanguinetti the privilege of spending his life in a city in which even the humblest of one's senses is the medium of poetic impressions. There was poetry in the warm, succulent exhalations of the opposite restaurant, where, among the lighted lamps, I could see the little tables glittering with their glass and silver, the tenderly-brown rolls nestling in the petals of the folded napkins, the waiters, in their snowy aprons, standing in the various attitudes of imminent eagerness, the agreeable *dame de comptoir*, sitting idle for the moment and rubbing her plump white hands. To a person so inordinately fond of chocolate as myself—there was literally a pretty little box, half-emptied of large soft globules of the compound, standing at that moment on my table—there was of course something very agreeable in the faint upward gusts of the establishment in my rez-de-chaussée. Presently, too, it appeared to me that the savours peculiar to the hairdressing-shop had assumed an extraordinary intensity, and that my right-hand nostril was exposed to the titillation of a new influence. It was as if a bottle of the finest hair-oil had suddenly been uncorked. Glancing that way again, I perceived the source of this rich effluvium. The hairdresser's door was open, and a person whom I supposed to be his wife had come to

inhale upon the threshold the lighter atmosphere of the street. She stood there for some moments, looking up and down, and I had time to see that she was very pretty. She wore a plain black silk dress, and one needed to know no more of millinery than most men to observe that it was admirably fitted to a charming figure. She had a little knot of pink ribbon at her throat and a bunch of violets in her rounded bosom. Her face seemed to me at once beautiful and lively—two merits that are not always united; for smiles, I have observed, are infrequent with women who are either very ugly or very pretty. Her light-brown hair was, naturally enough, dressed with consummate art, and the character of her beauty being suggestive of purity and gentleness, she looked (her black silk dress apart) like a Madonna who should have been *coiffée* by M. Anatole. What a delightful person for a barber's wife, I thought; and I saw her sitting in the little front shop, at the desk, and taking the money with a gracious smile from the gentlemen who had been having their whiskers trimmed in the inner sanctuary. I touched my own whiskers, and straightway decided that they needed trimming. In a few moments this lovely woman stepped out upon the pavement, and strolled along, in front of the shop-window, on a little tour of inspection. She stood there a moment, looking at the brilliant array of brightly-capped flacons, of ivory toilet-implements, of detached human tresses disposed in every variety of fashionable convolution: she inclined her head to one side and gently stroked her chin. I was able to perceive

that even with her back turned she was hardly less pretty than when seen in front—her back had, as they say, so much *chic*. The inclination of her head denoted contentment, even complacency; and indeed, well it might, for the window was most artistically arranged. Its principal glory was conferred by two waxen heads of lovely ladies, such as are usually seen in hairdressers' windows; and these wig-wearing puppets, which maintained a constant rotary movement, seemed to be a triumph of the modeller's art. One of the revolving ladies was dark, and the other fair, and each tossed back her head and thrust out her waxen bosom and parted her rosy lips in the most stylish manner conceivable. Several persons, passing by, had stopped to admire them. In a few moments a second inmate came to the door of the shop, and said a word to the barber's pretty wife. This was not the barber himself, but a young woman apparently employed in the shop. She was a nice-looking young woman enough, but she had by no means the beauty of her companion, who, to my regret, on hearing her voice, instantly went in.

After this I fell to watching something else, I forget what: I had quite forgotten Sanguinetti. I think I was looking at a gentleman and lady who had come into the restaurant and placed themselves near the great sheet of plate-glass which separated the interior from the street. The lady, who had the most wonderfully arched eyebrows, was evidently ordering the dinner, and I was struck with the profusion of its items. At last she began to eat her soup, with her little finger very much

curled out, and then my gaze wandered toward the hairdresser's window again. This circumstance reminded me that I was really very good-natured to be waiting so placidly for that dilatory Sanguinetti. There he stood in front of the coiffeur's, staring as intently and serenely into the window as if he had the whole evening before him. I waited a few moments, to give him a chance to move on, but he remained there, gaping like a rustic at a fair. What in the world was he looking at? Had he spied something that could play a part in his collection? For Sanguinetti was a collector, and had a room full of old crockery and uncomfortable chairs. But he cared for nothing that was not a hundred years old, and the pretty things in the hairdresser's window all bore the stamp of the latest Parisian manufacture—were part and parcel of that modern rubbish which he so cordially despised. What then had so forcibly arrested his attention? Was the poor fellow thinking of buying a new chignon, or a solitary pendent curl, for the object of his affections? This could hardly be, for to my almost certain knowledge his affections had no object save the faded crockery and the angular chairs I have mentioned. I had, indeed, more than once thought it a pity that he should not interest himself in some attractive little woman; for he might end by marrying her, and that would be a blessing, inasmuch as she would probably take measures for his being punctual when he was asked out to dinner. I tapped on the edge of the little railing which served as my window-guard, but the noise of

the street prevented this admonition from reaching his ear. He was decidedly quite too absorbed. Then I ventured to hiss at him in the manner of the Latin races—a mode of address to which I have always had a lively aversion, but which, it must be confessed, proceeding from Latin lips, reaches its destination in cases in which a nobler volume of sound will stop half way. Still, like the warrior's widow in Tennyson's song, he neither spake nor moved. But here, suddenly, I comprehended the motive of his immobility: he was looking of course at the barber's beautiful wife, the pretty woman with the face of a Madonna and the coiffure of a Parisienne, whom I myself had just found so charming. This was really an excuse, and I felt disposed to allow him a few moments' grace. There was evidently an unobstructed space behind the window, through which this attractive person could be perceived as she sat at her desk in some attitude of graceful diligence—adding up the items of a fine lady's little indebtedness for rouge-pots and rice-powder, or braiding ever so neatly the long tresses of a *fausse natte* of the fashionable colour. I promised myself to look out for this point of visual access the very first time I should pass.

I gave my tarrying guest another five minutes' grace, during which the lamps were lighted in the hairdresser's shop. The window now became extremely brilliant; the ivory brushes and the little silver mirrors glittered and flashed, the coloured cosmetics in the little toilet-bottles acquired an almost appetising radiance, and the

beautiful waxen ladies, tossing back their heads more than ever from their dazzling busts, seemed to sniff up the agreeable atmosphere. Of course the hairdresser's wife had become even more vividly visible, and so, evidently, Sanguinetti was finding out. He moved no more than if he himself had been a barber's block. This was all very well, but now, seriously, I was hungry, and I felt extremely disposed to fling a flower-pot at him: I had an array of these ornaments in the balcony. Just then my servant came into the room, and beckoning to this functionary I pointed out to him the gentleman at the barber's window, and bade him go down into the street and interrupt Mr. Sanguinetti's contemplations. He departed, descended, and I presently saw him cross the way. Just as he drew near my friend, however, the latter turned round, abruptly, and looked at his watch. Then, with an obvious sense of alarm, he moved quickly forward; but he had not gone five steps before he paused again and cast back a supreme glance at the object of his admiration. He raised his hand to his lips, and, upon my word, he looked as if he were kissing it. My servant now accosted him with a bow, and motioned toward my balcony; but Sanguinetti, without looking up, simply passed quickly across to my door. He might well be shy about looking up—kissing his hand in the street to pretty *dames de comptoir:* for a modest little man, who was supposed to care for nothing but bric-à-brac, and not to be in the least what is called "enterprising" with women, this was certainly a very smart jump. And the

hairdresser's wife? Had she, on her side, been kissing her finger-tips to him? I thought it very possible, and remembered that I had always heard that Paris is the city of gallantry.

Sanguinetti came in, blushing a good deal, and saying that he was extremely sorry to have kept me waiting.

"Oh," I answered, "I understand it very well. I have been watching you from my window for the last quarter of an hour."

He smiled a little, blushing still. "Though I have lived in Paris for fifteen years," he said, "you know I always look at the shops. One never knows what one may pick up."

"You have a taste for picking up pretty faces," I rejoined. "That is certainly a very pretty one at the hairdresser's."

Poor Sanguinetti was really very modest; my "chaff" discomposed him, and he began to fidget and protest.

"Oh," I went on, "your choice does great honour to your taste. She's a very lovely creature; I admire her myself."

He looked at me a moment, with his soup-spoon poised. He was always a little afraid of me; he was sure I thought him a very flimsy fellow, with his passion for cracked teacups and scraps of old brocade. But now he seemed a trifle reassured; he would talk a little if he dared. "You know there are two of them," he said, "but one is much more beautiful than the other."

"Precisely," I answered—"the fair one."

"My dear friend," murmured my guest, "she is the most beautiful object I ever beheld."

"That, perhaps, is going a little too far. But she is uncommonly handsome."

"She is quite perfect," Sanguinetti declared, finishing his soup. And presently he added, "Shall I tell you what she looks like?"

"Like a fashionable angel," I said.

"Yes," he answered, smiling, "or like a Madonna who should have had her hair dressed—over there."

"My dear fellow," I exclaimed, "that is just the comparison I hit upon a while ago!"

"That proves the truth of it. It is a real Madonna type."

"A little Parisianised about the corners of the mouth," I rejoined.

"Possibly," said Sanguinetti. "But the mouth is her loveliest feature."

"Could you see her well?" I inquired, as I helped him to a sweetbread.

"Beautifully — especially after the gas was lighted."

"Had you never noticed her before?"

"Never, strangely enough. But though, as I say, I am very fond of shop-windows, I confess to always having had a great prejudice against those of the hairdressers."

"You see how wrong you were."

"No, not in general; this is an exception. The women are usually hideous. They have the most impossible complexions; they are always fearfully sallow. There is one of them in my street, three doors from my own house: you would say she

was made of——" And he paused a moment for his comparison. "You would say she was made of tallow."

We finished our sweetbreads, and, I think, talked of something else, my companion presently drawing from his pocket and exhibiting with some elation a little purchase in the antiquarian line which he had made that morning. It was a small coffee-cup, of the Sèvres manufacture and of the period of Louis XV., very delicately painted over with nosegays and garlands. I was far from being competent in such matters, but Sanguinetti assured me that it bore a certain little earmark which made it a precious acquisition. And he put it back into its little red morocco case, and fell a-musing while his eyes wandered toward the window. He was fond of old gimcracks and bibelots, of every order and epoch, but he had, I knew, a special tenderness for the productions of the baser period of the French monarchy. His collection of snuff-boxes and flowered screens was highly remarkable—might, I suppose, have been called celebrated. In spite of his foreign name he was a genuine compatriot of my own, and indeed our acquaintance had begun with our being, as very small boys, at school together. There was a tradition that Sanguinetti's grandfather had been an Italian image-vendor, in the days when those gentlemen might have claimed in America to be the only representatives of a care for the fine arts. In the early part of the century they were also less numerous than they have since become, and it was believed that the founder of the trans-

atlantic stock of the Sanguinettis had, by virtue of his fine Italian eyes, his slouched hat, his earrings, his persuasive eloquence, his foreign idioms and his little tray of plaster effigies and busts, been deemed a personage of sufficient importance to win the heart and hand of the daughter of a well-to-do attorney in the State of Vermont. This lady had brought her husband a property which he invested in some less brittle department of the Italian trade, and, prospering as people, alas! prospered in those good old days, bequeathed, much augmented, to the father of my guest. My companion, who had several sisters, was brought up like a little gentleman, and showed symptoms even at the earliest age of his mania for refuse furniture. At school he used to collect old slate-pencils and match-boxes; I suppose he inherited the taste from his grandfather, who had perambulated the country with a tray covered with the most useless ornaments (like a magnified chess-board) upon his head. When he was twenty years old Sanguinetti lost his father and got his share of the patrimony, with which he immediately came to Europe, where he had lived these many years. When I first saw him, on coming to Paris, I asked him if he meant never to go back to New York, and I very well remember his answer. "My dear fellow" (in a very mournful tone), "what *can* you get there? The things are all second-rate, and during the Louis Quinze period, you know, our poor dear country was really—really——" And he shook his head very slowly and expressively.

I answered that there were (as I had been told)

very good spinning-wheels and kitchen-settles, but he rejoined that he cared only for things that were truly elegant. He was a most simple-minded and amiable little bachelor, and would have done anything possible to oblige a friend, but he made no secret of his conviction that "pretty things" were the only objects in the world worth troubling one's self about. He was very near-sighted, and was always putting up his glass to look at something on your chimney-piece or your side-table. He had a lingering, solemn way of talking about the height of Madame de Pompadour's heels and the different shapes of old Dutch candlesticks; and though many of his country-people thought him tremendously "affected," he always seemed to me the least pretentious of men. He never read the newspapers for their politics, and didn't pretend to: he read them only for their lists of auction-sales. I had a great kindness for him; he seemed to me such a pure-minded mortal, sitting there in his innocent company of Dresden shepherdesses and beauties whose smiles were stippled on the lids of snuff-boxes. There is always something agreeable in a man who is a perfect example of a type, and Sanguinetti was all of one piece. He was the perfect authority on pretty things.

He kept looking at the window, as I have said, and it required no great shrewdness to guess that his thoughts had stepped out of it and were hovering in front of the hairdresser's *étalage*. I was inclined to humour his enthusiasm, for it amused me to see a man who had hitherto found a pink-faced lady on a china plate a sufficiently substan-

tial object of invocation led captive by a charmer who would, as the phrase is, have something to say for herself.

"Shouldn't you have liked to have a closer view of her?" I asked, with a sympathetic smile.

He glanced at me and blushed again. "That lovely creature?"

"That lovely creature. Shouldn't you have liked to get nearer?"

"Indeed I should. That sheet of plate-glass is a great vexation."

"But why didn't you make a pretext for going into the shop? You might have bought a tooth-brush."

"I don't know that I should have gained much," said Sanguinetti, simply.

"You would have seen her move; her movement is charming."

"Her movement is—the poetry of motion. But I could see that outside."

"My dear fellow, you are not enterprising enough," I urged. "In your place I should get a footing in the shop."

He fixed his clear little near-sighted eyes upon me. "Yes, yes," he said, "it would certainly be delightful to be able to sit there and watch her: it would be more comfortable than standing outside."

"Rather, my dear boy. But sitting there and watching her? You go rather far."

"I suppose I should be a little in the way. But every now and then she would turn her face toward me. And I don't know but that she is as pretty behind as before," he added.

"You make an observation that I made myself. She has so much *chic*."

Sanguinetti kissed his finger-tips with a movement that he had learned of his long Parisian sojourn. "The poetry of *chic!* But I shall go further," he presently pursued. "I don't despair, I don't despair." And he paused, with his hands in his pockets, tilting himself back in his seat.

"You don't despair of what?"

"Of making her my own."

I burst out laughing. "Your own, my dear fellow! You are more enterprising than I thought. But what do you mean? I don't suppose that, under the circumstances, you can marry her?"

"No: under the circumstances, unfortunately, I can't. But I can have her always there."

"Always where?"

"At home, in my salon. It's just the place for her."

"Ah, my good friend," I rejoined, laughing, but slightly scandalised, "that's a matter of opinion."

"It's a matter of taste. I think it would suit her."

A matter of taste, indeed, this question of common morality! Sanguinetti was more Parisianised than I had supposed, and I reflected that Paris was certainly a very dangerous place, since it had got the better of his inveterate propriety. But I was not too much shocked to be still a good deal amused.

"Of course I shall not go too fast," he went on. "I shall not be too abrupt."

"Pray don't."

"I shall approach the matter gradually. I shall go into the shop several times, to buy certain things. First a pot of cold cream, then a piece of soap, then a bottle of glycerine. I shall go into a great many ecstasies and express no end of admiration. Meanwhile, she will slowly move around, and every now and then she will look at me. And so, little by little, I will come to the great point."

"Perhaps you will not be listened to."

"I will make a very handsome offer."

"What sort of an offer do you mean?"

"I am ashamed to tell you: you will call it throwing away money."

An offer of money! He was really very crude. Should I too come to this, if I continued to live in Paris? "Oh," I said, "if you think that money simply will do it——"

"Why, you don't suppose that I expect to have her for nothing?" He was actually cynical, and I remained silent. "But I shall not be happy again—at least for a long time"—he went on, "unless I succeed. I have always dreamed of just such a woman as that; and now at last, when I behold her perfect image and embodiment, why, I simply can't do without her." He was evidently very sincere.

"You are simply in love," I said.

He looked at me a moment, and blushed. "Yes, I honestly believe I am. It's very absurd."

"From some point of view or other, infatuations are always absurd," I said; and I decided that the matter was none of my business.

We talked of other things for an hour, but before he took leave of me Sanguinetti reverted to the beautiful being at the hairdresser's. "I am sure you will think me a great donkey," he said, "for taking that—that creature so seriously;" and he nodded in the direction of the other side of the street.

"I was always taught, in our country, that it is one's duty to take things seriously!"

I made a point, of course, the next day, of stopping at the hairdresser's window for the purpose of obtaining another glimpse of the remarkable woman who had made such an impression upon my friend. I found, in fact, that there was a large aperture in the back of the window through which it was very possible to see what was going on in a considerable part of the shop. Just then, however, the object of Sanguinetti's admiration was not within the range of vision of a passer-by, and I waited some time without her appearing. At last, having invented something to buy, I entered the aromatic precinct. To my vexation, the attendant who came forward to serve me was not the charming woman whom I had seen the evening before on the pavement, but the young person of inferior attractions who had come to the door to call her. This young person also wore a black silk dress and had a very neat figure; she was beautifully *coiffée* and very polite. But she was a very different affair from Sanguinetti's friend, and I rather grudged the five francs that I paid her for the little bottle of lavender-water that I didn't want. What should I do with a bottle of lavender-

water? I would give it to Sanguinetti. I lingered in the shop under half-a-dozen pretexts, but still saw no sign of its lovelier inmate. The other young woman stood smiling and rubbing her hands, answering my questions and giving explanations with high-pitched urbanity. At last I took up my little bottle and laid my hand upon the door-knob. At that moment a velvet curtain was raised at the back of the shop, and the hairdresser's wife presented herself. She stood there a moment, with the curtain lifted, looking out and smiling; on her beautiful head was poised a crisp little morning-cap. Yes, she was lovely, and I really understood Sanguinetti's sudden passion. But I could not remain staring at her, and, as I had exhausted my expedients, I was obliged to withdraw. I took a position in front of the shop, however, and presently she approached the window. She looked into it to see if it was in proper order. She was still smiling—she seemed always to be smiling—but she gave no sign of seeing me, and I felt that if there had been a dozen men standing there she would have worn that same sweetly unconscious mask. She glanced about her a moment, and then, extending a small, fair, dainty hand, she gave a touch to the back hair of one of the waxen ladies—the right-hand one, the blonde.

A couple of hours later, rising from breakfast, I repaired to my little balcony, from which post of observation I instantly espied a figure stationed at the hairdresser's window. If I had not recognised it otherwise, the attentive, absorbed droop of its head would at once have proved it to be Sanguin-

etti. "Why does he not go inside?" I asked myself. "He can't look at her properly out there." At this conclusion he appeared himself to have arrived, for he suddenly straightened himself up and entered the establishment. He remained within a long time. I grew tired of waiting for him to reappear, and went back to my arm-chair to finish reading the *Débats*. I had just accomplished this somewhat arduous feat when I heard the lame tinkle of my door-bell, a few moments after which Sanguinetti was ushered in.

He really looked love-sick; he was pale and heavy-eyed. "My too-susceptible friend," I said, "you are very far gone."

"Yes," he answered; "I am really in love. It is too ridiculous. Please don't tell any one."

"I shall certainly tell no one," I declared. "But it does not seem to me exactly ridiculous."

He gave me a grateful stare. "Ah, if you don't find it so, *tant mieux*."

"Unadvisable, rather; that's what I should call it."

He gave me another stare. "You think I can't afford it?"

"It is not so much that."

"You think it won't look well? I will arrange it so that the harshest critic will be disarmed. This morning she is in great beauty," he added, the next moment.

"Yes, I have had a glimpse of her myself," I said. "And you have been in the shop?"

"I have spent half-an-hour there. I thought it best to go straight to the point."

"What did you say?"

"I said the simple truth—that I have an intense desire to possess her."

"And the hairdresser's wife—how did she take it?"

"She seemed a good deal amused."

"Amused, simply? Nothing more?"

"I think she was a little flattered."

"I hope so."

"Yes," my companion rejoined, "for, after all, her own exquisite taste is half the business." To this proposition I cordially assented, and Sanguinetti went on: "But, after all, too, the dear creature won't lose that in coming to me. I shall make arrangements to have her hair dressed regularly."

"I see that you mean to do things *en prince*. Who is it that dresses her hair?"

"The coiffeur himself."

"The husband?"

"Exactly. They say he is the best in Paris."

"The best husband?" I asked.

"My dear fellow, be serious—the best coiffeur."

"It will certainly be very obliging of him."

"Of course," said Sanguinetti, "I shall pay him for his visits, as—if—as if——" And he paused a moment.

"As if what?"

"As if she were one of his fine ladies. His wife tells me that he goes to all the duchesses."

"Of course that will be something," I replied. "But still——"

"You mean that I live so far away? I know that, but I will give him his cab-fare."

I looked at him, and—I couldn't help it—I began to laugh. I had never seen such a strange mixture of passion and reason.

"Ah," he exclaimed, blushing, "you *do* think it ridiculous!"

"Yes," I said, "coming to this point, I confess it makes me laugh."

"I don't care," Sanguinetti declared, with amiable doggedness; "I mean to keep her to myself."

Just at this time my attention was much taken up by the arrival in Paris of some relatives who had no great talent for assimilating their habits to foreign customs, and who carried me about in their train as cicerone and interpreter. For three or four weeks I was constantly in their company, and I saw much less of Sanguinetti than I had done before. He used to appear, however, at odd moments, in my rooms, being, as may be imagined, very often in the neighbourhood. I always asked him for the latest tidings of his audacious flame, which had begun to blaze in a manner that made him perfectly indifferent to the judgment of others. The poor fellow was sincerely in love.

"Je suis tout à ma passion," he would say when I asked him the news. "Until that matter is settled I can think of nothing else. I have always been so when I have wanted a thing intensely. It has become a monomania, a fixed idea; and naturally this case is not an exception." He was always going into the shop. "We talk it over," he said. "She can't make up her mind."

"I can imagine the difficulty," I answered.

"She says it's a great change."

"I can also imagine that."

"I never see the husband," said Sanguinetti. "He is always away with his duchesses. But she talks it over with him. At first he wouldn't listen to it."

"Naturally!"

"He said it would be an irreparable loss. But I am in hopes he will come round. He can get on very well with the other."

"The other?—the little dark one? She is not nearly so pretty."

"Of course not. But she isn't bad in her way. I really think," said Sanguinetti, "that he will come round. If he does not we will do without his consent, and take the consequences. He will not be sorry, after all, to have the money."

You may be sure that I felt plenty of surprise at the business-like tone in which Sanguinetti discussed this unscrupulous project of becoming the "possessor" of another man's wife. There was certainly no hypocrisy about it; he had quite passed beyond the stage at which it is deemed needful to throw a sop to propriety. But I said to myself that this was doubtless the Parisian tone, and that, since it had made its mark upon so perfect a little model of social orthodoxy as my estimable friend, nothing was more possible than that I too should become equally perverted. Whenever, after this, Sanguinetti came in he had something to say at first about the lovely creature across the way. "Have you noticed her this morning?" he would demand. "She is really enchanting. I thought of asking leave to kiss her."

"I wonder you should ask leave," I answered. "I should suppose you would do it without leave, and count upon being forgiven."

"I am afraid of hurting her," he said. "And then if I should be seen from the street, it would look rather absurd."

I could only say that he seemed to me a very odd mixture of perversity and discretion, but he went on without heeding my comments: "You may laugh at the idea, but, upon my word, to me she is different every day; she has never the same expression. Sometimes she's a little melancholy —sometimes she's in high spirits."

"I should say she was always smiling."

"Superficially, yes," said Sanguinetti. "That's all the vulgar see. But there's something beneath it—the most delicious little pensive look. At bottom she's sad. She's weary of her position there, it's so public.—Yesterday she was very pale," he would say at another time; "I'm sure she wants rest. That constant movement can't be good for her. It's true she moves very slowly."

"Yes," said I, "she seemed to me to move very slowly."

"And so beautifully! Still, with me," Sanguinetti went on, "she shall be perfectly quiet; I will see how that suits her."

"I should think she would need a little exercise," I objected.

He stared a moment, and then accused me, as he often did, of "making game" of him. "There is something in your tone in saying that," he remarked; but he shortly afterward forgot my

sarcastic tendencies, and came to announce to me a change in the lady's coiffure. "Have you noticed that she has her hair dressed differently? I don't know that I like it; it covers up her forehead. But it's beautifully done, it's entirely new, and you will see that it will set the fashion for all Paris."

"Do they take the fashion from her?" I asked.

"Always. All the knowing people keep a note of her successive coiffures."

"And when you have carried her off, what will the knowing people do?"

"They will go by the other, the dark one—Mademoiselle Clémentine."

"Is that her name? And the name of your sweetheart?"

Sanguinetti looked at me an instant, with his usual helplessly mistrustful little blush, and then he answered, "Rose-Agathe."

When I asked him how his suit was prospering, he usually replied that he believed it to be merely a question of time. "We keep talking it over, and in that way, at any rate, I can see her. The poor woman can't get used to the idea."

"I should think not."

"She says it would change everything—that the shop would be a different place without her. She is so well known, so universally admired. I tell her that it will not be impossible to get a clever substitute; and she answers that, clever as the substitute may be, she will never have the peculiar charm of Rose-Agathe."

"Ah! she herself is aware then of this peculiar charm?"

"Perfectly, and it delights her to have me talk about it."

A part of the charm's peculiarity, I reflected, was that it was not spoiled by the absence of modesty; yet I also remembered the coiffeur's handsome wife had looked extremely *pudique*. Sanguinetti, however, appeared bent upon ministering to her vanity; I learned that he was making her presents. "I have given her a pair of earrings," he announced, "and she is wearing them now. Do notice them as you pass. They are great big amethysts, and are extremely becoming."

I looked out for our beautiful friend the next time I left the house, but she was not visible through the hairdresser's window. Her plainer companion was waiting upon a fine lady, presumably one of the duchesses, while Madame Anatole herself, I supposed, was posturing before one of the mirrors in the inner apartment, with Sanguinetti's big amethysts in her ears.

One day he told me that he had determined to buy her a *parure*, and he greatly wished I would come and help him to choose it. I called him an extravagant dog, but I good-naturedly consented to accompany him to the jeweller's. He led me to the Palais-Royal, and there, somewhat to my surprise, introduced me into one of those dazzling little shops which wear upon their front in neat gilt letters the candid announcement, "Imitation." Here you may purchase any number of glittering gems for the most inconsiderable sum, and indulge at a moderate expense a pardonable taste for splendour. And the splendour is most effective,

the glitter of the counterfeit jewels most natural. It is only the sentiment of the thing, you say to yourself, that prevents you from making all your purchases of jewelry in one of these convenient establishments; though, indeed, as their proprietors very aptly remark, fifty thousand francs more (for instance) is a good deal to pay for sentiment. Of this expensive superstition, however, I should have expected Sanguinetti to be guilty.

"You are not going to get a real set?" I asked.

He seemed a little annoyed. "Wouldn't you in that case blow me up for my extravagance?"

"It is highly probable. And yet a present of false jewelry! The handsomer it is, you know, the more ridiculous it is."

"I have thought of that," said my friend, "and I confess I am rather ashamed of myself. I should like to give her a real set. But, you see, I want diamonds and sapphires, and a real set such as I desire would cost about a hundred thousand francs. That's a good deal for—for——" And he paused a moment.

"For a barber's wife," I said to myself.

"Besides," my companion added, "she won't know the difference." I thought he rather underestimated her intelligence: a pretty Parisienne was, by instinct, a judge of parures. I remembered, however, that he had rarely spoken of this lady's intellectual qualities; he had dwelt exclusively upon her beauty and sweetness. So I stood by him while he purchased for two hundred francs a gorgeous necklace, and a coronet of the stones of Golconda. His passion was an odd affair

altogether, and an oddity the more or the less hardly mattered. He remarked, moreover, that he had at home a curious collection of artificial gems, and that these things would be an interesting addition to his stock. "I shall make her wear them all," he exclaimed; and I wondered how she would like it.

He told me afterwards that his offering had been most gratefully received, that she was now wearing the wonderful necklace, and that she looked lovelier than ever.

That evening, however, I stopped before the shop to catch a glimpse, if possible, of the barber's lady thus splendidly adorned. I had seldom been fortunate enough to espy her, and on this occasion I turned away disappointed. Just as I was doing so I perceived something which suggested that she was making a fool of my amiable friend. On the radiant bosom of one of the great waxen dolls in her window glittered a necklace of brilliants which bore a striking resemblance to the article I had helped Sanguinetti to select. She had made over her lover's tribute to this rosy effigy, to whom, it must be confessed, it was very becoming.

Yet, for all this, I was out in my calculation. A week later Sanguinetti came into my rooms with a radiant countenance, and announced to me the consummation of his dream. "She is mine! she is mine! mine only!" he cried, dropping into a chair.

"She has left the shop?" I demanded.

"Last night—at eleven o'clock. We went off in a cab."

"You have her at home?"

"For ever and ever!" he exclaimed, ecstatically.

"My dear fellow, my compliments!"

"It was not an easy matter," he went on. "But I held her in my arms."

I renewed my congratulations, and said I hoped she was happy; and he declared that she had an expression of pure bliss. There was something in her eyes. He added that I must immediately come and see her; he was impatient to present me. Nothing, I answered, would give me greater pleasure, but meanwhile what did the husband say?

"He grumbles a bit, but I gave him five hundred francs."

"You have got off easily," I said; and I promised that at my first moment of leisure I would call upon my friend's new companion. I saw him three or four times before this moment arrived, and he assured me that she had made a happy man of him. "Whenever I have greatly wanted a thing, waited for it, and at last got it, I have always been in bliss for a month afterwards," he said. "But I think that this time my pleasure will really last."

"It will last as long, I hope, as she herself does!"

"I am sure it will. This is the sort of thing —yes, smile away—in which I get my happiness."

"Vous n'êtes pas difficile," I rejoined.

"Of course she's perishable," he added in a moment.

"Ah!" said I, "you must take good care of her."

And a day or two later, on his coming for me, I went with him to his apartment. His rooms were charming, and lined from ceiling to floor with the "pretty things" of the occupant—tapestries and bronzes, terra-cotta medallions and pre-

cious specimens of porcelain. There were cabinets and tables charged with similar treasures; the place was a perfect little museum. Sanguinetti led me through two or three rooms, and then stopped near a window, close to which, half hidden by the curtain, stood a lady, with her head turned away from us, looking out. In spite of our approach she stood motionless until my friend went up to her and with a gallant, affectionate movement placed his arm round her waist. Hereupon she slowly turned and gazed at me with a beautiful brilliant face and large quiet eyes.

"It is a pity she creaks," said my companion as I was making my bow. And then, as I made it, I perceived with amazement—and amusement—the cause of her creaking. She existed only from the waist upward, and the skirt of her dress was a very neat pedestal covered with red velvet. Sanguinetti gave another loving twist, and she slowly revolved again, making a little gentle squeal. She exhibited the back of her head, with its beautifully braided tresses resting upon her sloping waxen shoulders. She was the right-hand effigy of the coiffeur's window—the blonde! Her movement, as Sanguinetti had claimed, was particularly commendable, and of all his pretty things she was certainly the prettiest.

1878.

POOR RICHARD.

I.

MISS WHITTAKER'S garden covered a couple of acres, behind and beside her house, and at its further extremity was bounded by a large pasture, which in turn was bordered by the old disused towing-path beside the river, at this point a slow and shallow stream. Its low, flat banks were unadorned with rocks or trees, and a towing-path is not in itself a romantic promenade. Nevertheless, here sauntered bareheaded, on a certain spring evening, the mistress of the acres just mentioned and many more beside, in sentimental converse with an impassioned and beautiful youth.

She herself would have been positively plain, but for the frequent recurrence of a magnificent smile—which imparted a charm to her somewhat undistinguished features—and (in another degree) for the elegance of her dress, which expressed one of the later stages of mourning, and was of that voluminous abundance proper to women who are both robust and rich. The good looks of her companion, for very good they were, in spite of several defects, were set off by a shabby suit, as carelessly worn as it was inartist-

ically made. His manner, as he walked and talked, was that of a nervous, headstrong man, wrought almost to desperation; while she had the air of a person a good deal bored but determined to be patient. A brief silence, however, had at last fallen upon them. Miss Whittaker strolled along quietly, looking at the slow-mounting moon, and the young man gazed on the ground, swinging his stick. Finally, with a heavy blow, he brought it to earth.

"Oh, Gertrude!" he cried, "I despise myself."

"That's very horrid," said Gertrude.

"And, Gertrude, I adore you."

"That's more horrid still," said Gertrude, with her eyes still on the moon. And then, suddenly and somewhat impatiently transferring them to her companion's face—"Richard," she asked, "what do you mean when you say you adore me?"

"Mean? I mean that I love you."

"Then why don't you say what you mean?"

The young man looked at her a moment. "Will you give me leave to say *all* I mean?"

"Oh dear!" Then, as he remained silent, "I wait for your words," Gertrude added.

Yet he still said nothing, but went striking vehemently at the weeds by the water's edge, like a young fellow who sees that he is in the wrong whatever line he takes.

"Gertrude!" he suddenly exclaimed, "what more do you want than the assurance that I love you?"

"I want nothing more. I am quite satisfied with that. You yourself seemed to wish to pile it up."

"Either you won't understand me," cried Richard, "or"—darting a vicious glance at her—"you can't!"

Miss Whittaker stopped and looked thoughtfully into his face. "In our position if it becomes you to sacrifice reflection to feeling, it becomes me to do the reverse. Listen to me, Richard. I *do* understand you, and better, I believe, than you understand yourself."

"Oh, you think me a baby, I know!"

But she continued, heedless of his interruption. "I thought that, by leaving you to yourself awhile, your feelings might become clearer to you. But they seem to be growing only more confused. I have been so fortunate, or so unfortunate, I hardly know which,"—and she smiled faintly,—"as to make you like me. That's all very well, but you must not make too much of it. Nothing could make me happier than to be liked by you, or by any one else. But here it must stop with you, as it stops with others."

"It does not stop here with others."

"I beg your pardon. You have no right to say that. It is partly out of justice to others that I speak to you as I am doing. I shall always be one of your best friends, but I shall never be more. It is best I should tell you this at once. I might trifle with you awhile and make you happy (since upon such a poor thing you seem to set your happiness) by allowing you to suppose that I care for you in another way; but the end would soon come, and then where should we be? You may, in your dis-

appointment, call me heartless now—I freely give you leave to call me anything that will ease your mind—but what would you call me then? Friendship, Richard, is an excellent cure for love. Here is mine." And she held out her hand.

"No, I thank you," said Richard, gloomily folding his arms. "I know my own feelings," and he raised his voice. "Haven't I lived with them night and day for weeks and weeks? Great heaven, Gertrude Whittaker, this is no fancy! I'm not one of that sort. My whole life has gone into my love. God has let me idle it away hitherto only that I might begin it with you. Dear Gertrude, hear me! I have some, at least, of the faculties of a man. I know I'm not respectable, but I honestly believe I should repay any one who would bear with me. It's true I have neither worked, nor persisted, nor studied, nor earned a cent. But, on the other hand, I have never cared for any woman before. I have waited for you. And now—now, after all, I am to sit down to simple liking—to friendship! The devil! Be friends with men whom you don't make mad! You do me!"

An honest flush rose to Gertrude's cheek. "So much the worse for you!" she cried, with a bitter laugh. "So much the worse for both of us! But what is your contention? Do you wish to marry me?"

Richard flinched a moment under this tacit proposition suddenly ringing in the air, but not from want of heart. "You have named it," he said.

"Well, then, I only pity you the more for your

consistency. I can only entreat you again to rest content with what I have offered you. It's not such a bad substitute, Richard, as I understand it. What my love might be I don't know—I couldn't answer for that; but of the kind of interest I take in you I am very sure. We both have our duties in this matter, and I have resolved to take a liberal view of mine. I might lose patience with you, you know, and turn away from you altogether—leave you alone with your dreams, and let you break your heart. But it's rather by seeing more of me than by seeing less that your feelings will change."

"You don't mean it! And yours?"

"I have no doubt they will change, too; not in kind, but in degree. The better I know you, I am sure, the better I shall like you. The better too you will like me. Don't turn your back upon me—I speak the truth. You will get to entertain a serious opinion of me—which I'm sure you haven't now, or you wouldn't talk of my making you mad. But you must be patient. It's a singular fact that it takes longer to learn to live on rational terms with a woman than to fancy one adores her. A sense of madness is a very poor feeling to marry upon. You wish, of course, to leave off your idle life and your bad habits—you see I am so thoroughly your friend that I am not afraid of touching upon disagreeable facts, as I should be if I were your 'adored.' But you are so indolent, so irresolute, so undisciplined, so uneducated"—Gertrude spoke deliberately and watched the effect of her words—"that you find a

change of life very difficult. I propose, with your consent, to appoint myself your care-taker. Henceforth my house will be open to you as to my dearest friend. Come as often and stay as long as you please. Not in a few weeks, perhaps, nor even in a few months, but in God's good time, you will be a capable young man, in working order—which I don't consider you now, and which I know you don't consider yourself. But I have a great opinion of your talents" (this was very shrewd of Gertrude), "and even of your nature. If I turn out to have done you a service, you will not want to marry me then."

Richard had silently listened, with a deepening frown. "That's all very pretty," he said; "but it's humbug—humbug from beginning to end. What's the meaning of all that rigmarole about the inconsistency of friendship and love? Such talk is enough to make one curse. Refuse me outright, and send me to the devil, if you must; but don't bemuddle your own brains at the same time. Ah, one little word knocks it all to pieces: I want you for my *wife!* You make an awful mistake in treating me as a boy—a deadly mistake. I *am* in working order—I began to live properly when I began to love you. I have sworn off drinking as effectually as if I hadn't touched a drop for twenty years. I hate it, I loathe it—I have drunk my last. No, Gertrude, I am no longer a boy—you have cured me of that. Hang it, that's why I love you! Don't you see? Ah, Gertrude," —and his voice fell—"you are a great enchantress! You have no arts, you have none of the airs and

graces of the girls that are called pretty; but you are an enchantress without them. It's your nature. You are so divinely, damnably honest! Those clever things you just said were meant for a dash of cold water, but you can't drown me by holding me under a spout. You will say it's nothing but common sense. Very likely; but that is the point. Your common sense captivates me—it's for that that I love you."

There was something now so calmly resolute in his tone that Gertrude was sickened. She found herself weaker than he, while the happiness of both of them demanded that she should be stronger.

"Richard Maule," she said, "you are unkind!" There was a tremor in her voice as she spoke, and as she ceased speaking she burst into tears. A selfish sense of victory took possession of the young man. He threw his arm about her; but she shook it off. "You are a coward, sir!" she cried.

"Oh, softly!" said Richard, flushing angrily.

"You go too far; you persist beyond decency."

"You hate me now, I suppose," said Richard, brutally, like one at bay.

Gertrude brushed away her tears. "No, indeed," she answered, sending him a dry, clear glance. "To hate you I should have to have loved you. I pity you still."

Richard looked at her a moment. "I don't feel tempted to return the feeling, Gertrude," said he. "A woman with so much diplomacy as you needs no pity."

"I have not diplomacy enough to read your sarcasm, sir; but I have good-nature enough to excuse it, and I mean to keep my good-nature to the end. I mean to keep my temper, I mean to be just, I mean to be conclusive, and not to have to return to this matter. It's not for my pleasure, I would have you know, that I go into all this; I have nerves as well as you. Therefore listen to me once again. If I don't love you, Richard, in your way, I don't; and if I can't, I can't. We can't love by will. But with friendship, when it is once established, I believe the will and the reason may have a great deal to do. I will, therefore, put the whole of my mind into my friendship for you, and in that way we shall perhaps be even. Such a feeling—as I shall naturally show it—will, after all, not be very different from that other feeling you ask—as I should naturally show it. Bravely to reconcile himself to such difference as there is is no more than a man of honour ought to do. Do you understand me?"

"You have an admirable way of putting things. 'After all,' and 'such difference as there is'! The difference is the difference of marriage and no-marriage. I suppose you don't mean that you are willing to live with me without that ceremony?"

"You suppose correctly."

"Then why do you falsify matters? A woman is either a man's wife, or she isn't."

"Yes; and a woman is either a man's friend, or she isn't."

"And you are mine, and I am an ungrateful

brute not to rest satisfied! That's what you mean! Heaven knows you are right"—and he paused a moment, with his eyes on the ground. "Don't despise me, Gertrude," he went on—"I am not so ungrateful as I seem. I am very much obliged to you for the pains you have taken. Of course I understand your not loving me. You would be a grand fool if you did; and you are no fool, Gertrude."

"No, I am no fool, Richard. It's a great responsibility—it's dreadfully vulgar; but, on the whole, I am rather glad."

"So am I. I could hate you for it; but there is no doubt it's why I love you. If you were a fool you might love me; but I shouldn't love you, and if I must choose, I prefer that."

"Heaven has chosen for us. Ah, Richard," pursued Gertrude, with admirable simplicity, "let us be good and obey heaven, and we shall be sure to be happy." And she held out her hand once more.

Richard took it and raised it to his lips. She felt their pressure and withdrew it.

"Now you must leave me," she said. "Did you ride?"

"My horse is at the village."

"You can go by the river, then. Good-night."

"Good-night."

The young man moved away in the gathering dusk, and Miss Whittaker stood for a moment looking after him.

II.

To appreciate the importance of this conversation the reader must know that Miss Gertrude Whittaker was a young woman of four-and-twenty, whose father, recently deceased, had left her alone in the world, with a large fortune, accumulated by various enterprises in that part of the State. He had appointed a distant and elderly kinswoman, by name Miss Pendexter, as his daughter's household companion; and an old friend of his own, known to combine shrewdness with integrity, as her financial adviser. Motherless, country-bred, with rather thick features, Gertrude on reaching her majority had neither the tastes nor the manners of a fine lady. Of a vigorous, active constitution, with a warm heart, a cool head, and a very pretty talent for affairs, she was, in virtue both of her wealth and of her tact, one of the principal persons of the country-side. These facts had forced her into a prominence which she made no attempt to elude, and in which she now felt thoroughly at home. She knew herself to be a power in the land; she knew that, present and absent, she was continually talked about as the rich Miss Whittaker; and although as modest as a woman need be, she was neither so timid nor so nervous as to wish to shirk her implied obligations. Her feelings were indeed, throughout, strong, rather than delicate; and yet there was in her whole nature, as the world had learned to look at it, a kind of genial discretion which at-

tracted universal respect. She was impulsive, yet circumspect; thrifty, yet open-handed; literal, yet addicted to joking; keenly observant of human distinctions, yet almost indiscriminately hospitable; with an immense fund of common sense beneath all; and yet beyond this—like the priest behind the king—and despite her preponderantly prosaic and, as it were, secular tone, a certain latent suggestion of heroic possibilities which he who had once become sensible of them (supposing him to be young and enthusiastic) would linger about her hoping to elicit, as you might stand and inhale a florid and vigorous dahlia which, for an instant, in your passage, should have proved delightfully fragrant. It is upon the actual existence, in more minds than one, of a mystifying sense of this desultory aroma that our story is based.

Richard Maule and Gertrude Whittaker were old friends. They had, in the first place, gone democratically to the town-school together, as children; and then their divergent growth, as boy and girl, had been conscious of an elastic bond in a continued intimacy between Gertrude and Fanny Maule, Richard's sister, who, however, in the fulness of time had married and followed her husband to California. With her departure the old relations of habit between her brother and her friend had slackened and gradually ceased. Richard had grown up a rebellious and troublesome boy, with a disposition combining stolid apathy and hot-headed eagerness in equal, contradictory proportions. Losing both of his parents

before he was well out of jackets, he had found himself at the age of sixteen in possession actual, and as he supposed uncontested, of the paternal acres. It was not long, however, before those turned up who were disposed to question his immediate ability to manage them ; the result of which was, that the property was leased for five years, and that Richard was taken bodily possession of by a maternal uncle, living on a farm of his own some three hundred miles away. Here our young man spent the remainder of his minority, ostensibly learning agriculture with his cousins, but actually learning nothing. He had very soon established, and had subsequently enjoyed without a day's interval, the reputation of an ill-natured fool. He was dull, disobliging, brooding, lowering. Reading and shooting he liked a little, because they were solitary pastimes ; but he was very slow in acquiring the arts which help a man to live happily with others. It was possible to get on with him only because he was at once too selfish and too simple for mischief. As soon as he came of age he entered upon the enjoyment of the old place on which his boyhood had been passed, and to which he appeared to cling the more perversely as it was known to be very thin land. He avoided his neighbours, his father's former associates ; he seemed to take pleasure in braving their disapproval of his queer proceedings ; he informed them that he wanted no help but what he paid for, and that he expected to work his farm for himself and by himself. In short, he proved himself to their satisfaction egregiously

ungrateful and conceited. They were not slow to discover that his incapacity was as great as his vanity. In two years he had more than undone the work of the late lessee, who had tried some clever experiments on the thankless soil. At the end of three years people spoke of him as cracked; it seemed to those who observed him that there was something so wanton in his errors as really to impugn his sanity. He appeared to have accepted this view of his condition, and to have given up all pretence of work. He went about silent and sullen, like a man who feels that he has a quarrel with fate. About this time it became generally known that he was often the worse for liquor; and he hereupon acquired the deplorable reputation of a man worse than unsociable—a man who boozes alone—although it was still doubtful whether this practice was the cause or the effect of his poor crops. About this time, too, he began again to see something of Gertrude Whittaker. For many months after his return he had been held at his distance, together with most of the local swains, by the knowledge of her father's extreme hostility to all suitors and fortune-hunters, and then, subsequently, by the illness preceding the old man's death. When, however, at last, on the expiration of her term of mourning, Miss Whittaker opened to society her long-blockaded ports, Richard had, to all the world's amazement, been among the first to profit by this extension of the general privilege and to cast anchor in the wide and peaceful waters of her friendship. He found himself at this moment,

considerably to his surprise, in his twenty-fourth year; that is, a few months younger than the heiress.

It was impossible that she should not have gathered from mere juxtaposition an impression of the poor figure he cut in the world, and of his peculiar relation to his neighbours and his own affairs. Thanks to this impression, Richard found a very warm welcome—the welcome of easy compassion. Gertrude gave him all the back-news of his sister Fanny, with whom he had dropped correspondence, and, impelled by Fanny's complaints of his long silence, ventured upon a friendly recommendation that he should go straight home and write a letter to California. Richard sat before her, gazing at her out of his dark eyes, and not only attempting no defence of his conduct, but rejoicing dumbly in the utter absence of any possible defence—his exposure seemed so delightful. He wished he could be scolded like that every day or two; nothing had ever touched him so softly. He carried away an extraordinary sense of general alleviation; and forthwith began a series of visits which, in the space of some ten weeks, culminated in the interview I have set before the reader. Painfully diffident in the company of most women, Richard had not from the first known what it was to be shy with Gertrude. As a man of the world finds it useful to refresh his social energies by an occasional *tête-à-tête* of an hour with himself, so Richard, with whom solitude was the rule, derived a certain austere satisfaction from an hour's contact with

this young lady's quick wits and good-humour, her liberal way of life and active charity. Gradually, however, from a salutary process, this became a regular luxury. It was now pleasant to go to Gertrude because he enjoyed the contagion of her own success—because he witnessed her happiness without a sensation of envy—because he forgot his entanglements and bad habits—because, finally, his soul slept away its troubles beneath her kind, clear eye, very much as his body had often slept away its weariness in the shade of a murmuring apple-tree. But the soul, like the body, will not sleep long without dreaming; and it will not dream often without wishing at last to tell its dreams. Richard had one day ventured to impart his visions to Gertrude, and the revelation apparently had not been at all to her taste.

The fact that this blundering youth had somehow worked himself into an intimacy with Miss Whittaker very soon became public property among their neighbours; and in the hands of these good people, naturally enough, received an important addition in the inference that—strange as it might seem—she was going to change her name for his. He was, of course, regarded as a very lucky fellow, and the prevalence of this impression was doubtless not without its effect on the forbearance of certain long-suffering creditors. And even if she was not to marry him, it was further argued, she yet might lend him money; for it was assumed without question that the necessity of raising money was the mainspring of Richard's suit. It must be declared without

delay that this assumption was precipitate and unfair. Our hero had faults enough, but a mercenary habit was not one of them; nor was an excessive concern on the subject of his debts one of his virtues. As for Gertrude, wherever else her perception of her friend's feelings may have been at fault, it was not at fault on this point. That he loved her as desperately as he tried to make her believe she indeed doubted; but it never occurred to her to question his disinterestedness. And so, on the other hand, it was strictly because she was not in love with him that she resisted him, and not on account of the disparity of their fortunes. In accepting his very simple and natural overtures to friendship, in calling him "Richard" in remembrance of old days, and in submitting generally to the terms of their old acquaintance, she had foreseen no dangerous complications. She had regarded him as one more helpless human being to "look after." She had espoused his interests (like all good women, Gertrude was ever more or less of a partisan) because she loved his sister and because she pitied himself. She would stand to him *in loco sororis*. The reader has seen that she had given herself a long day's work.

It is not to be supposed that Richard's comparatively pacific retreat at the close of the walk by the river implied any instinct of resignation to the prospects which Gertrude had opened to him. It is explained rather by an intensity of purpose so deep as to believe it could take its time. This was not the end of his suit, but the beginning.

He would not give in until he was positively beaten. It was all very well, he reflected, that Gertrude should reject him. Such a woman as she ought properly to be striven for, and there was something ridiculous in the idea that she should be easily won, whether by himself or by another. Richard was a slow thinker, but he thought more wisely than he talked; and he now took back all his angry boasts of accomplished self-mastery and humbly surveyed the facts of the case. He was on the way to recovery, but he was by no means cured, and yet his very humility assured him that he was curable. He was no hero, certainly, but he was better than his life; he was no scholar, but, in his own view at least, he was not an ass. He was good enough to be better; he was good enough not to sit by the hour soaking his limited understanding in whiskey. And at the very least, if he was not worthy to possess Gertrude, he was yet worthy to strive to obtain her, and to live for evermore upon the glory of there having been such a question between himself and the great Miss Whittaker. He would raise himself then to that level from which he could address her as an equal, from which he would have a right to insist on something. How he would do this he was at a loss to determine. He was conscious of a great deal of crude intention, but he cursed the ignorance which was such an obstacle to his doing anything in particular. He longed vaguely for some continuous muscular effort, at the end of which he should find himself face to face with his mistress.

But as, instead of being a Pagan hero, with an enticing task-list of impossibilities, he was a plain New England cultivator, with a bad conscience, and nature with him and not against him—as, after slaying his dragon, after renouncing liquor, his work was a simple operation in common sense—in view of these facts he found but little inspiration in his prospect. Nevertheless he fronted it bravely. He was not to obtain Gertrude by making a fortune, but by making himself a man, by learning to live. But as to learn to live is to learn to work, he would find some use for his valour. He would keep sober and clear-headed; he would retrieve his land and pay his debts. Then let her refuse him if she could—or if she dared!

Meanwhile Gertrude, on her side, sat quietly at home, turning over in her own fashion a dozen little plans for her friend's redemption and for making the stream of his passion turn some other mill. Not but that she meant rigorously to fulfil her part of the engagement to which she had invited him in that painful scene by the river. Yet, with however much of the same firmness and mildness she might still meet him, she could not feel secure against repeated intrusion without the knowledge of a partial change, at least, in Richard's own attitude. Such a change could only be effected through some preparatory change in his life; and a change in his life could be brought only about by the introduction of some new influence. This influence, unfortunately, was hard to find. However positively Gertrude had dwelt

upon the practical virtue of her friendship, she was, on further reflection, led to ask herself whether it mightn't be helped in its work. He was welcome enough to that, but he needed something more. It suddenly occurred to her, one morning, after Richard's image had been crossing and recrossing her mental vision for a couple of hours with wearisome pertinacity, that a world of good might accrue to him through the acquaintance of a person so clever, so superior as Captain Severn. There was no one who would not be better for knowing such a man. She would recommend Richard to his kindness, and him she would recommend to Richard's—what? Here was the rub! Where was there common ground between Richard and such a one as he? To beg him to try to like Richard was easy; to ask Richard to care for *him* was absurd. If Richard could only know him the matter would take care of itself—he would take a fancy to him in spite of every prejudice. But to begin to praise any object to her young friend was just the way to make him hate it. He himself was such a subject for pity that it had never occurred to her to recommend any one to his benevolence. All the world seemed above him, and he was therefore out of sorts with all the world. If she could put her hand on some creature less favoured of nature and of fortune than himself, he might feel some sympathy for such a being. Captain Severn had, to her knowledge, not been a darling of destiny, but he was apparently quite contented with his lot, and thus he was raised several degrees above

Richard, who would be certain to find a tacit rebuke in his resignation. Still, for all this, Gertrude would bring them together. She had a high opinion of the Captain's generosity, and if Richard should wantonly throw away such a chance the loss would be his own. It may be thought that in this enterprise Captain Severn was somewhat inconsiderately handled. But women have been known to show their affection for a man by sending him as a missionary to the cannibals. These words suggest the propriety of a short description of the person to whom they refer.

III.

EDMUND SEVERN was a man of eight-and-twenty, who, having for some time combated fortune and his own inclinations as a mathematical tutor in a country-college, had, on the opening of the war, transferred his abilities to a more heroic field. The regiment of volunteers to which he belonged, and which was now a part of the army of the Potomac, had been raised in Miss Whittaker's district, and she had given almost every man in it —as a rich woman could do—some sign that her thoughts were with him. His soldiership, like his scholarship, was solid rather than brilliant. He was not destined to be heard of at home, nor to be lifted out of regimental work ; but on many an important occasion in Virginia he had proved himself in a modest way a very useful officer. Coming up, early in the war, with a severe

wound, to be nursed by a married sister who was domiciled in Gertrude's neighbourhood, he was, like all his fellow-sufferers within a wide circuit, very soon honoured with a visit of anxious inquiry from Miss Whittaker, who was as yet known to him only by report, and who transmitted to him the warmest assurances of sympathy and interest, together with the liveliest offers of assistance ; and incidentally, as it were, to these, a copious collection of specimens from her hot-house and store-room. Severn had taken the air for the first time in Gertrude's own cushioned barouche, which she had sent to his door at an early stage of his convalescence, and which of course he had immediately made use of to pay his respects to his benefactress. He was taken aback by the humility with which, on this occasion, betwixt smiles and tears, she protested that to be of service to the suffering brave was a sacred privilege. The Captain liked her on the spot, and thought of nothing else as he drove home. Half-a-dozen visits, during the ensuing month, more than sufficed to convert him into what is called an admirer ; but as the weeks passed by he perceived there were great obstacles to his ripening into a real aspirant. Captain Severn was a serious man ; he was conscientious, discreet, deliberate, unused to act without a definite purpose. He liked to see where he was going, and never went far simply because the country was pretty ; he wanted to know where he should arrive. In pursuance of this tradition he had asked himself whether he was prepared to face the consequences of falling in

love with our young lady. Since he had taken a vow, a twelvemonth before, not to marry until, by some means or another, he should have an income to point to, no great change had come to pass in his fortunes. He was still a poor man and an unsettled one; he was still awaiting his real vocation. Moreover, while subject to the chances of war, he thought it wrong to draw a woman on; he shrank in horror from the thought of converting some fresh girl into a figure of mourning. Miss Whittaker pleased him as he had never been pleased, but that seemed to him no reason for recanting his principles. He could no more afford to marry a rich woman than a poor one. When he should have earned enough money for two to live upon, then he would be free to marry whomsoever he might fancy—a beggar or an heiress. The truth is that the Captain was a great deal too proud. It was his fault that he could not bring himself to forget the difference between his poverty and Gertrude's wealth. He would of course have resented the insinuation that the superior fortune of the woman he loved could seem to him a reason for not declaring his love; but there is no doubt that in the case before us the sentiment in question didn't dare—or hadn't as yet dared—to lift its head. Severn had a deep aversion to being in debt. It is probable that, after all, he would have accepted obligations gracefully enough from a person with certain rights; but while a woman was as yet neither his mistress nor his wife, the idea of being beholden to her was odious to him.

It would have been a question with one who knew him whether at this juncture these logical ice-blocks were destined to resist the warmth of Gertrude's charms, or gradually to evaporate and flood the position. There would have been no question, however, but that he could keep up his consistency only at the cost of a considerable moral strain. At this moment, then, Severn had made up his mind that Gertrude was not for him, and that it behoved him to walk very straight. That Miss Whittaker, with a hundred rational cares, was anything less than supremely oblivious of him individually, it never occurred to him to suspect. The truth is that Gertrude's private and personal emotions were entertained in a chamber of her heart so remote from the portals of speech that no sound of their revelry found its way into the world. She thought of her modest, soldierly, scholarly friend as a gentleman who would perhaps some day take to wife some woman, who, however nice she might be, couldn't be as nice as he. But what was *she* to him? A local roadside figure—at the very most a sort of millionaire Maud Müller—with whom it was pleasant for a lonely wayfarer to exchange a friendly good-morning. Her duty was to fold her arms resignedly, to sit quietly on the sofa and watch a great happiness sink below the horizon. With this impression on Gertrude's part it is not surprising that Severn was not wrenched out of himself. The prodigy was apparently to be wrought—if wrought at all—by her taking her loss for granted. This left nothing between them but her casual hospitality, and the

effect of that method, as yet, upon Severn had been none other than its effect upon all the world. It kept him in his best form. They talked and fraternised, and moreover they watched each other, but they breathed not a word of what each was thinking about most. It was with perfect honesty, therefore, that she had rebutted Richard's insinuation that the Captain enjoyed any especial favour. He was only another of her social pensioners.

The result of Gertrude's meditations was that she despatched a note to each of her two friends, requesting them to take tea with her on the following day. A couple of hours before tea-time she received a visit from one Major Luttrel, who was recruiting for a United States regiment at a large town, some ten miles away, and who had ridden over in the afternoon, in accordance with a general invitation conveyed to him through an old lady who had bespoken Miss Whittaker's consideration for him as a man of delightful manners and wonderful talents. Gertrude had replied to her venerable friend, with her wonted alacrity, that she would be very glad to see Major Luttrel should he ever come that way, and then had thought no more about him until his card was brought to her as she was dressing for the evening. He found so much to say to her that the interval passed very rapidly for both of them, before the simultaneous entrance of Miss Pendexter and of Gertrude's guests. The two officers were already slightly known to each other, and Richard was introduced to each of them. They eyed the dis-

tracted-looking young farmer with some curiosity. Richard's was at all times a figure to attract attention; but now he was really dramatic (so Severn thought at least) with his careless garments, his pale, handsome face, his dark mistrustful eyes, his nervous movements. Major Luttrel, who struck Gertrude as at once very agreeable and the least bit in the world insufferable, was, of course, invited to remain—which he straightway consented to do; and it soon became evident to Miss Whittaker that her little plan would have no fruit. Richard practised a certain defiant, conscious silence, which, as she feared, gave him eventually a very pretentious air. His companions displayed that half-confessed effort to shine and to outshine natural to clever men who find themselves concurring to the entertainment of a young and agreeable woman. Richard sat by, wondering in splenetic amazement whether he were an ignorant boor or they were only a pair of grimacing comedians. He decided, correctly enough, in substance, for the former hypothesis; for it seemed to him that Gertrude's extreme accommodation (for as such he viewed it) of her tone and her manner to theirs was only another proof of her tremendous cleverness. How magnanimous an impulse on Richard's part was this submission for the sake of the woman he loved to a fact damning to his own vanity, could have been determined only by one who knew the proportions of that vanity. He writhed and chafed under the polish of tone and the variety of allusion by which the two officers consigned him to insignificance; but he was soon

lost in wonder at the richness of resource of their hostess. For a moment it seemed to him that she ought to spare him an exhibition by which he could only be mortified—for didn't she know his thoughts, she who was the cause of them all? But the next instant he asked himself, with a great revulsion of feeling, whether he was afraid to see the proof of how superior she was to himself. As he gulped down the sickening fact of his comparative, nay, his absolute ignorance of the great world represented by his rivals, he felt like anticipating its consequences by a desperate sally into the very field of their conversation. To some such movement Gertrude was continually inviting him by her glances, her smiles, her questions, by certain little calculated silences. But poor Richard knew that if he should attempt to talk he would choke; and this assurance he imparted to his friend in a look piteously eloquent. He was conscious of a sensation under which his heart was fast turning into a fiery furnace, destined to consume all his good resolutions. He could not answer for the future now. Suddenly, as tea was drawing to a close, he became aware that Captain Severn had sunk into a silence very nearly as helpless as his own, and that he was covertly watching the progress of a lively dialogue between Miss Whittaker and Major Luttrel. He had the singular experience of seeing his own feelings reflected in the Captain's face; that is, he discovered there an incipient jealousy. Severn too was in love!

IV.

ON rising from table Gertrude proposed an adjournment to the garden, where she was very fond of entertaining her friends at this hour. The sun had sunk behind a long line of hills, far beyond the opposite bank of the river, a portion of which was discernible through a gap in the intervening wood. The high-piled roof and chimney-stacks, the picturesquely crowded surface, of the old patched and renovated farm-house which constituted Miss Whittaker's residence, were ruddy with the declining rays. Our friends' long shadows were thrown over the smooth grass. Gertrude, having graciously gone to meet the gentlemen's desire for their cigars, suggested a stroll toward the river. Before she knew it she had accepted Major Luttrel's arm; and, as Miss Pendexter preferred remaining at home, Severn and Richard found themselves lounging side by side at a short distance behind their hostess. Gertrude, who had noticed the taciturnity which had suddenly fallen upon Captain Severn, and in her simplicity had referred it to some unwitting failure of attention on her own part, hoped to make up for her neglect by having him at her own side. She was in some degree consoled, however, by the sight of his conjunction with Richard. As for Richard, now that he was on his feet and in the open air, he found it easier to speak.

"Who is that fellow?" he asked, nodding toward the Major.

"Major Luttrel, of the —th Artillery."

"I don't like his face much," said Richard.

"Don't you?" rejoined Severn, amused at his companion's bluntness. "He's not handsome, but he looks like a soldier."

"He looks like a scoundrel, I think," said Richard.

Severn laughed outright, so that Gertrude glanced back at him. "Dear me! I think you put it rather strongly. He seems to me a very pleasant member of society."

Richard was sorely perplexed. He had expected to find acceptance for his bitterest animadversions, and lo! here was the Captain fighting for his enemy. Such a man as that was no rival. So poor a reviler could be but a poor adorer. Nevertheless, a certain new-born scepticism in regard to his old fashion of measuring human motives prevented him from adopting this conclusion as final. He would try another question.

"Do you know Miss Whittaker well?"

"Tolerably well. She was very kind to me when I was ill. Since then I have seen her a good many times."

"That's a way she has, being kind to people who are in trouble," Richard remarked, with a shrewdness which he thought superior. But as the Captain merely puffed his cigar responsively, he pursued, "What do you think of her appearance?"

"I like it very much," said the Captain.

"She isn't beautiful," said Richard, with calculation.

Severn was silent a moment, and then, just as Richard was about to dismiss him from his thoughts, as neither formidable nor satisfactory, he replied, with some emphasis, "You mean she isn't pretty. She *is* beautiful, I think, in spite of the irregularity of her face. It's the sort of face you don't forget. She has no features, no colour, no lilies nor roses, no attitudes; but she has *looks*, expressions."

Severn spoke Richard's mind as well as his own. That "She isn't beautiful" had been an extempore version of the young man's most cherished dogma, namely, She is beautiful. The reader will remember that he had so translated it on a former occasion. Now, all that he felt was a sense of gratitude to the Captain for having put it so much more finely than he, the above being his choicest public expression of it. But the Captain's eyes, somewhat brightened by his short but significant speech, were following Gertrude's slow steps. Richard saw that he could learn more from them than from any further oral declaration, for something in the lips beneath them seemed to indicate that *they* had judged themselves to have said enough, and they were obviously not the lips of a simpleton. As he thus deferred, with unwonted courtesy, to the Captain's silence, and transferred his gaze sympathetically to Gertrude's shapely shoulders and to her listening ear, he gave utterance to a tell-tale sigh—a sigh which there was no mistaking. Severn looked about; it was now his turn to probe a little. "Good heavens," he exclaimed, "that boy is in love with her!"

After the first shock of surprise he accepted this fact with rational calmness. Why shouldn't he be in love with her? "*Je le suis bien*," said the Captain; "or, rather, I'm not." Could it be, Severn pursued, that *he* was a favourite? He was an underbred young farmer, but it was plain that he had a soul of his own. He almost wished indeed that Richard might turn out to be in Gertrude's good graces. "But if he is," he reflected, "why should he sigh like the wind in the chimney? It is true that there is no arguing for lovers. I, who am out in the cold, take my comfort in whistling most impertinently. It may be that my friend here groans for very bliss. I confess, however, that he scarcely looks like a gratified swain."

And forthwith this faint-hearted gentleman felt a twinge of pity for Richard's probable ill-luck; and as he compared it with the elaborately defensive condition of his own affections he felt a further pang of self-contempt. But it was easier to restore the equilibrium of his self-respect by an immediate cession of the field than by contesting it against this wofully wounded knight. "Whether he wins her or not, he'll fight for her," the Captain mused; and, as he glanced at Major Luttrel, he felt there was some comfort in that. He didn't fancy the Major so very much.

They had now reached the water's edge, where Gertrude, having made her companion pause, turned round to await her other guests. As they came up Severn saw, or thought he saw (which is a very different thing), that her first look was at

Richard. The "admirer" in his breast rose fratricidal for a moment against the quiet observer; but the next it was pinioned again. "Amen," said the Captain; "it's none of my business."

At this moment Richard was soaring very high. The end of his bad feelings had been a sudden exaltation. He looked at the scene before him with all sorts of remarkable ideas. Why should he stand tongue-tied, sulking at opportunity, when all nature beckoned him into the field? There was the river-path where, a fortnight before, he had found an eloquence attested by Gertrude's tears. There was the admirable Gertrude herself, whose hand he had kissed and whose waist he had clasped. Surely, he was master here! Before he knew it he had begun to express himself—rapidly, nervously, almost defiantly. Major Luttrel having made an observation about the prettiness of the river, Richard entered upon a description of its general character and its superior beauty in that part of its course which traversed his own property, together with an enumeration of the fish which were to be found in it and a story about a great overflow ten years before. He spoke with sufficient volubility, but with a kind of angry shyness, his head thrown back and his eyes on the opposite bank. At last he stopped, feeling that he had given proof of his manhood, and looked towards Gertrude, whose eyes he had been afraid to meet until he had seen his adventure to a close. But she was looking at Captain Severn, under the impression that Richard had secured his auditor.

Severn was looking at Luttrel, and Luttrel at Miss Whittaker; and all were apparently so deep in observation that they had marked neither his speech nor his silence. "Truly," thought the young man, "I'm well out of the circle!" But he was determined to be patient still, which was assuredly, all things considered, a very enlightened resolution. Yet there was always something spasmodic and unnatural in Richard's magnanimity. A touch in the wrong place would cause it to collapse. It was Gertrude's evil fortune to administer this puncture. As the party turned about toward the house Richard stepped to her side and offered her his arm, hoping in his heart —so implicitly did he count upon her sympathy, so almost boyishly, filially, did he depend upon it —for some covert token that his heroism, such as it was, had not been lost upon her.

But Gertrude, intensely preoccupied by the desire to repair her fancied injustice to the Captain, shook her head at him without even meeting his eye. "Thank you," she said; "I want Captain Severn;" who forthwith approached.

Poor Richard felt his feet touch the ground again, and at that instant he could have flung the Captain into the stream. Major Luttrel placed himself at Gertrude's other elbow, and Richard stood behind them, almost livid with spite, and half resolved to turn upon his heel and make his way home by the river. But it occurred to him that a more elaborate vengeance would be to follow the trio before him back to the lawn, and then show them how well he could dispense with

their company. Accordingly, when they reached the house he stood aloof and bade Gertrude a grim good-night. He trembled with eagerness to see whether she would make an attempt to detain him. But Miss Whittaker, reading in his voice—it had grown too dark to see his face at the distance at which he stood—the story of some fancied affront, and unconsciously contrasting it, perhaps, with Severn's clear and unwarped accents, obeyed what she deemed a prompting of self-respect, and gave him, without her hand, a farewell as cold as his own. It is but fair to add that, a couple of hours later, as she reviewed the incidents of the evening, she repented very characteristically of this little act of justice.

V.

RICHARD hardly knew how he got through the following week. He found occupation, to a much greater extent than he suspected, in a sordid yet at the same time heroic struggle with himself. For several months now he had been leading, under Gertrude's inspiration, a very decent and sober life. So long as he was at comparative peace with Gertrude and with himself, such a life was more than easy ; it was delightful. It produced a moral buoyancy infinitely more delicate than the exhilaration of liquor. There was a kind of fascination in keeping the score of his abstinence. Having abjured excesses, he practised temperance after the fashion of a novice : nothing would suit him but not to drink at all. He was like an

unclean man who, having washed himself clean, remains in the water to splash about. He wished to be religiously, superstitiously pure. This was easy, as I have said, so long as his goddess smiled, even though it were as a goddess indeed—as a creature unattainable. But when she frowned and the heavens grew dark, Richard's sole dependence was his own good intention — as flimsy a trust for an upward scramble, one would have predicted, as a tuft of grass on the face of a perpendicular cliff. Flimsy as it looked, however, it served him. It started and crumbled, but it held, if only by a single fibre. When Richard had cantered fifty yards away from Gertrude's gate in a fit of stupid rage, he suddenly pulled up his horse and gulped down his passion, swearing an oath that, suffer what torments of feeling he might, he would not at least break the continuity of his reform. It was enough to be drunk in mind ; he would not be drunk in body. A singular, almost comical feeling of antagonism to Gertrude lent force to this resolution. "No, madam," he cried within himself, "I shall *not* fall back. Do your best! I shall keep straight." We recover from great offences and afflictions by the aid of the same egotism they were perhaps meant to chasten. Richard went to bed that night fasting as grimly as a Trappist monk ; and his foremost impulse the next day was to stupefy himself with some drudgery. He found no task to his taste ; but he spent the day so actively, in mechanically getting rid of the time, that Gertrude's image found no chance to be importun-

ate. He was engaged in the work of self-preservation, the most serious and absorbing work possible to man. Compared to this question of his own manhood it sometimes seemed not very important, after all, that Gertrude should listen to him. He tried later to build up a virtue by the most ruthless experiments and tests. He took long rides over the country, passing within a stone's throw of as many of the scattered wayside taverns as could be combined in a single circuit. As he drew near them he sometimes slackened his pace, as if he were about to dismount, pulled up his horse, gazed a moment, then, thrusting in his spurs, galloped away again like one pursued. At other times, in the late evening, when the window-panes were aglow with the ruddy light within, he would walk slowly by, looking at the stars, and, after maintaining this stoical pace for a couple of miles, would hurry home to his own dim and lonely dwelling. Having successfully performed this feat a certain number of times, he found his desire for Gertrude coming back to him, but bereft in the interval of a jealousy which now seemed to him to have been fantastic. One morning, at any rate, he leaped upon his horse and cantered back to Miss Whittaker's.

He had made himself comparatively sure of his will; but he was yet to acquire the mastery of his impulses. As he gave up his horse, according to his wont, to one of the men at the stable, he saw another animal, which he recognised as Captain Severn's. "Steady, my boy," he murmured to himself, as he would have done to a frightened

steed. On the steps of the house he encountered the Captain, who had just taken his leave. Richard gave him a nod which was intended to be very friendly, and Severn nodded back, but didn't speak. Richard observed, however, that he was very pale, and that he was pulling a rosebud to pieces, as he walked ; whereupon our young man quickened his step. Finding the parlour empty, he instinctively crossed over to a small room adjoining it, which Gertrude had converted into a conservatory ; and as he did so, hardly knowing it, he lightened his heavy-shod tread. The glass door was open and Richard looked in. There stood Gertrude, with her back to him, bending apart with her hands a couple of tall flowering plants, and looking through the glazed partition behind them. Advancing a step, and glancing over the poor girl's shoulder, Richard had just time to see Severn mounting his horse at the stable-door, before Gertrude, startled by his approach, turned hastily round. Her face was flushed hot, her eyes brimming with tears.

"You!" she exclaimed, sharply.

Richard's head swam. That single word was so charged with an invidious distinction that it seemed the death-knell of all his hopes. He stepped inside the room and closed the door, keeping his hand on the knob.

"Gertrude," he said, "you love that man!"

"Well, sir?"

"Do you confess it?" cried Richard.

"Confess it? Richard Maule, how dare you use such language? I am in no humour for a scene. Let me pass."

Gertrude was angry ; but as for Richard, it may almost be said that he was mad. "One scene a day is enough, I suppose," he cried. "What are these tears about? Wouldn't he have you? Did he refuse you, as you refused me? Unfortunate creature!"

Gertrude looked at him a moment with concentrated scorn. "You poor idiot!" she said, for all answer. She pushed his hand from the latch, flung open the door, and moved rapidly away.

Left alone, Richard sank down on a sofa and covered his face with his hands. It burned them, but he sat motionless, repeating to himself, mechanically, as if to avert thought, "You poor idiot! you poor idiot!" At last he got up and made his way out.

It seemed to Gertrude, for several hours after this incident, that she had a remarkably strong case against fortune. It is not necessary to repeat here the words she had exchanged with Captain Severn. They had come within an ace of a mutual understanding, and when a single movement of the hand of either would have jerked aside the curtain that hung between them, some malignant influence had paralysed them both. Had they too much pride?—too little imagination? We must content ourselves with supposing so. Severn had walked blindly across the yard, saying to himself, "She belongs to another," and adding, as he saw Richard, "and such another!" Gertrude had stood at her window, repeating, under her breath, "He belongs to himself, himself alone." And as if this were not enough, when misconceived,

slighted, wounded, she had turned back to her old, passionless, dutiful past, on the path of retreat to this asylum Richard Maule had arisen to forewarn her that she should find no peace even at home. There was something in the impertinence of his appearance at this moment which gave her a feeling that fate was against her, and there even entered into her mind a certain element of dread of the man whose passion was so insistent. She felt that it was out of place any longer to pity him. He was the slave of his passion, but his passion was strong. In her reaction against Severn's exaggerated respect, it gratified her, after a little, to remember that Richard had been brutal. He, at least, had ventured to insult her—he had loved her enough to forget himself. He had dared to make himself odious in her eyes, because he had cast away conventional forms. What cared he for the impression he made? He cared only for the impression he received. The violence of this reaction, however, was the measure of its duration. It was impossible that she should walk backward so fast without stumbling. Brought to her senses by this accident, she became aware that her judgment had deserted its post. She smiled to herself as she reflected that it had been taking holiday for a whole afternoon. "Richard was right," she said to herself. "I am no fool. I can't be a fool if I try. I am too thoroughly my father's daughter for that. I love that man, but I love myself better. Of course, then, I don't deserve to have him. If I loved him in a way to merit his love, I would sit down this moment and

write him a note telling him that if he does not come back to me I shall die. But I shall neither write the note nor die. I shall live and grow stout, and look after my chickens and my flowers and my colts, and thank the Lord in my old age that I have never done anything immodest. Well! I am as He made me. Whether I shall ever deceive others, I know not; but I certainly shall never deceive myself. I am quite as sharp as Gertrude Whittaker; and this it is that has kept me from making a fool of myself and writing to poor Richard the note that I wouldn't write to Captain Severn. I needed to fancy myself wronged. I suffer so little—I needed a sensation. So, shrewd Yankee that I am, I thought I would get one cheaply by taking up that unhappy boy. Heaven preserve me from the heroics, especially the economical heroics! The one heroic course possible I decline. What, then, have I to complain of? Must I tear my hair because a man of taste has resisted my unspeakable charms? To be charming you must be charmed yourself, or at least you must be able to be charmed; and that apparently I am not. I didn't love him, or he would have known it. If you won't risk anything how can you demand of others that they shall?"

But at this point of her meditations Gertrude almost broke down. She felt that she was assigning herself but a dreary future. Never to be loved but by an intemperate, uneducated boy, who would never grow older, was a cheerless prospect, for it seemed to convert her into a kind of maiden-

aunt. Yet her conscience smote her for her meditated falsity to Richard, her momentary readiness to succumb to the temptation to revert to him out of pique. She recoiled from this thought as from an act cruel and immoral. Was he any better suited to her now than he had been a month before? Was she to apply for comfort where she would not apply for counsel? Was she to drown her vexation at losing Captain Severn in a passion got up for the occasion? Having done the young man so bitter a wrong in intention, nothing would appease her magnanimous remorse (as time went on) but to repair it in fact. She went so far as to regret the harsh words she had cast upon him in the conservatory. He had been insolent and unmannerly, but he had an excuse. Much should be forgiven him, for he loved much. Even now that Gertrude had imposed upon her feelings a sterner regimen than ever, she could not defend herself from a sweet and sentimental thrill—a thrill in which, as we have intimated, there was something of a tremor —at the recollection of his strident accents and his angry eyes. It was far from her to desire a renewal, however brief, of this exhibition. She wished simply to efface from the young man's morbid mind the impression that she really scorned him, for she knew that against such an impression he was capable of taking the most reckless and ruinous comfort.

Before many mornings had passed, accordingly, she had a horse saddled, and, dispensing with attendance, took her way to his straggling

farm. The house-door and half the windows stood open; but no answer came to her repeated summons. She rode round to the rear of the house, to the barn-yard, thinly tenanted by a few common fowl, and across the yard to a road which skirted its lower extremity and was accessible by an open gate. No human figure was in sight; nothing was visible in the hot stillness but the scattered and ripening crops, over which, in spite of her nervous solicitude, Miss Whittaker cast the glance of a connoisseur. A great uneasiness filled her mind as she measured the wide fields, apparently abandoned by their young master, and reflected that she perhaps was the cause of his absence. Ah, where was Richard? As she looked and listened in vain, her heart rose to her throat, and she felt herself on the point of calling wistfully upon his name. But her voice was stayed by the sound of a heavy rumble of cart-wheels, beyond a turn in the road. She touched up her horse and cantered along until she reached the bend. A great four-wheeled cart, laden with masses of newly-broken stone and drawn by four oxen, was slowly advancing towards her. Beside it, patiently cracking his whip and shouting monotonously, walked a young man in a slouched hat and a red shirt, with his trousers thrust into his dusty boots. As he saw Gertrude he halted a moment, amazed, and then advanced, flicking the air with his whip. Gertrude's heart went out to him in a sigh of really tender relief. Her next reflection was that he had never looked so well. The truth is that, in this rough adjustment, the native barbarian appeared

to his advantage. His face and neck were browned by a week in the fields, his eye was clear, his step seemed to have learned a certain manly dignity from its attendance on the heavy bestial tramp. Gertrude, as he reached her side, pulled up her horse and held out her gloved fingers to his brown, dusty hand. He took them, looked for a moment into her face, and for the second time raised them to his lips.

"Excuse my glove," she said, with a little smile.

"Excuse mine," he answered, exhibiting his sunburnt, work-stained hand.

"Richard," said Gertrude, "you never had less need of excuse in your life. You never looked half so well."

He fixed his eyes upon her a moment. "Why, you have forgiven me!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I have forgiven you—both you and myself. We both of us behaved very absurdly, but we both of us had reason. I wish you had come back."

Richard looked about him, apparently at a loss for a rejoinder. "I have been very busy," he said, at last, with a simplicity of tone slightly studied. He was always wishing to produce an effect upon her, and it seemed to him just then that this was the way.

It was a certain instinct of calculation, too, that forbade Gertrude to express all the joy which this assurance gave her. Excessive joy would have implied undue surprise; and it was a part of her plan frankly to expect the best things of her com-

panion. "If you have been busy I congratulate you. What have you been doing?"

"Oh, a hundred things! I have been quarrying, and draining, and clearing, and doing a lot of chores. I thought the best thing was just to put my own hands to it. I am going to make a stone fence along the great lot on the hill there. Wallace is for ever grumbling about his boundaries. I mean to fix them once for all. What are you laughing at?"

"I am laughing at certain foolish apprehensions that I have been indulging for a week past. You are wiser than I, Richard. I have no imagination."

"Do you mean that *I* have? I haven't enough to guess what you do mean."

"Why, do you suppose, have I come over this morning?"

"Because you thought I was sulking on account of your having called me an idiot."

"Sulking, or worse. What do I deserve for the wrong I have done you?"

"You have done me no wrong. You reasoned fairly enough. You are not obliged to know me better than I know myself. It's just like you to be ready to take back that bad word, and try to make yourself believe that it was unjust. But it was perfectly just, and therefore I have managed to bear it. I *was* an idiot at that moment—a nasty, impudent idiot. I don't know whether that man had been saying sweet things to you. But if he had you wouldn't have objected—your face told that; I should have been less than a

man, I should be unworthy of your—your affection, if I had failed to see it. I did see it—I saw it as clearly as I see those oxen now; and yet I bounced in with my own ill-timed claims. To do so was to be an awful ass. To have been other than an ass would have been to have waited, to have backed out, to have bitten my tongue off before I spoke, to have done anything but what I did. I have no right to claim you, Gertrude, until I can woo you better than that. It was the most fortunate thing in the world that you spoke as you did: it was even kind. It saved me all the misery of groping about for a starting-point. Not to have spoken as you did would have been to let me off far too easy; and then, probably, I should have sulked, or, as you very considerately say, done worse. I had made a false move in the game, and the only thing to do was to repair it. But you were not obliged to know that I would so readily admit my move to have been false. Whenever I have made a fool of myself, before, I have been for sticking it out, and trying to turn all mankind—that is, *you*—into a fool too, so that I shouldn't be an exception. But this time, I think, I had a kind of inspiration. I felt that my case was desperate. I felt that if I adopted my folly now I adopted it for ever. The other day I met a man who had just come home from Europe, and who spent last summer in Switzerland. He was telling me about the mountain-climbing over there—how they get over the glaciers, and all that. He said that you sometimes came upon great slippery, snow-covered slopes that end short

off in a precipice, and that if you stumble or lose your footing as you cross them diagonally, why, you go shooting down, and you're gone; that is, but for one little dodge. You have a long walking-pole, with a sharp end, you know, and as you feel yourself sliding—it's as likely as not to be in a sitting posture—you just take this and ram it into the snow before you, and there you are, stopped. The thing is, of course, to drive it in far enough, so that it won't yield or break; and in any case it hurts infernally to come whizzing down upon this upright pole. But the interruption gives you time to pick yourself up. Well, so it was with me the other day. I stumbled and fell; I slipped, and was whizzing downward; but I just drove in my pole and pulled up short. It nearly tore me in two; but it saved my life." Richard made this speech with one hand leaning on the neck of Gertrude's horse, and the other on his own side, and with his head slightly thrown back and his eyes on hers. She had sat quietly in her saddle, looking down at him. He had spoken slowly and deliberately, but without hesitation and without heat. "This is not romance, it's reality," thought Gertrude. And this feeling it was that dictated her reply, divesting it of sentiment so effectually as almost to make it sound trivial.

"It was fortunate you had an alpenstock," she said.

"I shall never travel without one again."

"Never, at least, with a companion who has the bad habit of pushing you off the path."

"Oh, you may push all you like," said Richard. "I give you leave. But isn't this enough about myself?"

"That's as you think."

"Well, it's all I have to say for the present, except that I am tremendously glad to see you, and that of course you will stay awhile."

"But you have your work to do."

"Oh, I say, never you mind my work. I have earned my dinner this morning, if you have no objection; and I propose to share it with you. So we will go back to the house." He turned her horse's head about, started up his oxen with his voice, and walked along beside her on the grassy roadside, with one hand on the horse's mane and the other swinging his whip.

Before they reached the yard-gate Gertrude had thought over what he had just said to her. "Enough about himself," she said, silently echoing his words. "Yes, heaven be praised, it *is* about himself. I am but a means in this matter—he himself, his own character, his own happiness, is the end." Under this conviction it seemed to her that her part was appreciably simplified. Richard was learning wisdom and self-control, and to exercise his reason—such was the suit that he was destined to gain. Her duty was as far as possible to remain passive, and not to interfere with the working of the gods who had selected her as the instrument of their miracle. As they reached the gate Richard made a trumpet of his hands, and sent a ringing summons into the fields; whereupon a farm-boy approached, and, with an

undisguised stare of amazement at Gertrude, took charge of his master's team. Gertrude rode up to the door-step, where her host assisted her to dismount, and bade her go in and make herself at home, while he busied himself with the bestowal of her horse. She found that, in her absence, the old woman who administered her friend's household had reappeared, and had laid out the preparations for his mid-day meal. By the time he returned, with his face and head shining from a fresh ablution and his shirt-sleeves decently concealed by a coat, Gertrude had apparently won the complete confidence of Mrs. Catching.

Gertrude doffed her hat, and tucked up her riding-skirt, and sat down, face to face with her entertainer, over his crumpled table-cloth. The young man played the host very tenderly and naturally; and Gertrude hardly knew whether to infer from his perfect self-possession that her star was already on the wane, or that it was higher in the heavens than ever. The solution of her doubts was not far to seek; Richard was absolutely at his ease in her presence. He had told her indeed that she intoxicated him; and truly, in those moments when she was compelled to oppose her quiet surfaces to his crude unrest, her whole presence seemed to him to have a kind of wine-like strength. He had told her that she was an enchantress, and this assertion, too, had its measure of truth. But her spell was a steady one; it sprang not from her beauty, her wit, her grace—it sprang from her character. In other words, Gertrude exercised the magnificent power of

making her lover forget her face. Agreeably to this fact, his most frequent feeling when he was with her was a consciousness of the liberty to be still—a sensation not unlike that which in the early afternoon, as he lounged in his orchard with a pipe, he derived from the sight of the hot, vaporous hills. He was innocent of that delicious trouble which Gertrude's thoughts had touched upon as a not unnatural result of her visit, and which another woman's fancy would perhaps have demanded as an indispensable proof of its success. "Porphyro grew faint," the poet assures us, as he stood in Madeline's chamber on Saint Agnes's eve. But Richard did not in the least grow faint now that his mistress was actually filling his musty old room with her voice, her touch, her looks; that she was sitting in his unfrequented chairs, trailing her skirt over his faded carpet, casting her perverted image upon his cheap mirror, and breaking his daily bread. He was not fluttered when he sat at her well-served table and trod her muffled floors—why then should he be fluttered now? Miss Whittaker was herself in all places, and (once granted that she was not in trouble) to be at her side was to drink peace as fully in one place as in another.

Richard accordingly ate a great working-day dinner in Gertrude's despite, and she ate a small one for his sake. She asked questions, moreover, and offered counsel, with very sisterly freedom. She deplored the rents in his table-cloth and the dismemberments of his furniture; and although by no means absurdly fastidious in the matter of

household elegance, she could not but think that Richard would be a happier and a better man if he were a little more comfortable. She forbore, however, to criticise the poverty of his domestic arrangements, for she felt that the obvious answer was that such a state of things was the penalty of his living alone; and it was desirable, under the circumstances, that this idea should remain inarticulate.

When at last Gertrude began to bethink herself of going, Richard broke a long silence by the following question: "Gertrude, *do* you love that man?"

"My dear sir," she said, "I refused to tell you before, because you asked the question as a right. Of course you do so no longer. No—I don't love him. I have been near it—but I have missed it. And now good-bye."

For a week after her visit Richard worked with renewed tenacity and felt like a hero. But one morning he woke up with all his courage gone, and limpness and languor in its place. He had been straining his faith in himself to an extreme tension, and the chord had suddenly snapped. In the hope that Gertrude's tender fingers might repair it he rode over to her, towards evening. On his way through the village he found people gathered in knots, reading fresh copies of the Boston newspapers over each other's shoulders, and learned that tidings had just come of a great battle in Virginia, which was also a great defeat. He procured a copy of the paper from a man who had done with it, and made haste to Gertrude's dwelling.

She received his story with all the passionate imprecations and regrets that were then in fashion. Before long Major Luttrel presented himself, and for half-an-hour there was no talk but about the battle. The talk, however, was chiefly between Gertrude and the Major, who found considerable ground for differing opinion, she being a rabid Republican, and he in cool opposition. Richard sat by, listening apparently, but with the detachment of one to whom the matter of the discourse was of much less interest than the manner of those engaged in it. At last, when tea was announced, Gertrude told her friends, very frankly, that she would not invite them to remain—that her heart was too heavy with her country's woes and with visions of carnage and suffering, to allow her to play the hostess—and that in short she was in the humour to be alone. Of course there was nothing for the gentlemen but to obey: but Richard went out cursing the law under which, in the hour of his mistress's sorrow, his company was a bore, not a cure. He watched in vain, as he bade her farewell, for some little sign that she would like him to stay but that as she wished to get rid of his companion civility demanded she should dismiss them both. No such sign was forthcoming, for the simple reason that Gertrude was sensible of no such undercurrent. The men mounted their horses in silence, and rode slowly along the lane which led from Miss Whittaker's stables to the highroad. As they approached the top of the lane they perceived in the twilight a mounted

figure coming towards them. Richard's heart began to beat with an angry foreboding, which was confirmed as the rider drew near and disclosed the features of Captain Severn. Major Luttrel and he, being bound to exchange some greeting, pulled up their horses; and as an attempt to pass them in narrow quarters would have been a greater incivility than even Richard was prepared to commit, he likewise halted.

"This is ugly news, isn't it?" said Severn. "It has determined me to go back to-morrow."

"Go back where?" asked Richard.

"To my regiment."

"Are you quite on your feet?" asked Major Luttrel. "How is that hole in your side?"

"It's so much better that I believe it can finish getting well down there as easily as here. Good-bye, Major; perhaps we shall meet again." And he shook hands with Major Luttrel. "Good-bye, Mr. Maule." And, somewhat to Richard's surprise, he stretched over and held out his hand to him.

Richard felt that it was tremulous, and, looking hard into his face, thought he saw there a kind of agitation, of choked emotion. Hereupon his fancy coursed back to Gertrude, sitting where he had left her, in the sentimental twilight, alone with her heavy heart. With a word, he reflected, a single little word, a look, a gesture, this happy man whose hand I hold can heal her distress. "Oh," he cried to himself, "that by this hand I might hold him fast for ever!"

It seemed to the Captain that Richard's grasp was needlessly protracted and severe. "What a fist

the young horse-breaker has!" he thought. "Good-bye," he repeated aloud, disengaging himself.

"Good-bye," said Richard. And then he added, he hardly knew why, "Are you going to bid good-bye to Miss Whittaker?"

"Of course I am. Isn't she at home?"

Whether Richard really paused or not before he answered, he never knew. There suddenly arose such a tumult in his bosom that it seemed to him several moments before he became conscious of his reply. But it is probable that to Severn it came only too soon.

"No," said Richard; "she's not at home. She is out for the evening. We have just been calling." As he spoke he shot a glance at his companion, armed with a challenge of his impending denial. But the Major just met his glance and then dropped his eyes. This slight motion was a horrible revelation—he had served the Major too!

"Dear me, I'm so sorry," said Severn, slacking his rein—"I'm so very sorry!" And from his saddle he looked down toward the house more longingly and regretfully than he knew.

Richard felt himself turning from pale to consuming crimson. There was a simple sincerity in Severn's words which was almost irresistible. For a moment he was on the point of shouting out a loud denial of his falsehood. "She is there, she's alone and in tears, awaiting you! Go to her—and be damned!" But before he could gather his words into his throat they were arrested by Major Luttrel's cool, clear voice, which, in its urbanity, seemed to mock at retractation.

"My dear Captain," said the Major, "I shall be very glad to take charge of any message."

"Thank you, Major. Pray do. Say how extremely sorry I was. It was my last chance. Good-bye again." And Captain Severn hastily turned his horse about, gave him his spurs and galloped away, leaving his friends standing alone in the middle of the road. As the sound of his retreat expired, Richard, in spite of himself, drew a long breath. He sat motionless in the saddle, hanging his head.

"Mr. Maule," the Major remarked at last, "that was very brilliantly done."

Richard looked up. "I never told a lie before —never!"

"Upon my soul, then, you did it uncommonly well. You did it so well I almost believed you. No wonder poor Severn did!"

Richard was silent; then suddenly he broke out, "In God's name, sir, why don't you call me a blackguard? I have done a beastly act!"

"Oh come," said the Major, "you needn't mind that with me. We will take everything that's proper in the way of remorse for granted—consider that said. I feel bound to let you know that I am really much obliged to you. If you hadn't stopped him off, how do you know but that I might have done so?"

"If you had, I would have given you the lie in your teeth."

"Would you, indeed? It's very fortunate, then, that I held my tongue. If you will have it so, I won't deny that your little invention sounded very

ugly. I'm devilish glad I didn't have anything to do with it, if you come to that."

Richard felt his wit sharpened by his red-hot scorn—a scorn far greater for his companion than for himself. "I am glad to hear that it did sound ugly. To me it seemed beautiful, holy, just. For the space of a moment it seemed absolutely right that I should say what I did. But you saw my fault in its horrid nakedness, and yet you let it pass. You have no excuse."

"I beg your pardon. You are immensely ingenious, but you are remarkably wrong. Are you going to make out that I am the guilty party? Upon my word, you are a cool hand. I *have* an excuse. I have the excuse of being interested in Miss Whittaker's not having other people running after her."

"So I suppose. But you have no disinterested regard for her. Otherwise——"

Major Luttrel laid his hand on Richard's bridle. "Mr. Maule," said he, "I have no wish to talk metaphysics over this matter. You had better say no more. I know that your feelings are not of an enviable kind, and I am therefore prepared to be good-natured with you. But you must be civil yourself. You have done a nasty thing, you are ashamed of it, and you wish to shift the responsibility upon me, which is more shabby still. My advice is that you behave like a man of spirit and swallow your little scruples. I trust you are not going to make a fool of yourself by any apology or any fancied reparation. As for its having seemed holy and just to do what you did,

that is mere gammon. A fib is a fib, and as such is often excusable. As anything else—as a thing beautiful, holy, or just—it's quite inexcusable. Yours was a fib to you, and a fib to me. It serves me, and I accept it. I suppose you understand me. I adopt it. You don't suppose it was because I was frightened by those big black eyes of yours that I held my tongue. As for my having a disinterested regard for Miss Whittaker, I have no report to make to you about it. I will simply say that I intend, if possible, to marry her."

"She'll not have you. She'll never marry a cold-blooded cheat."

"I think she'll prefer him to a hot-blooded one. Do you want to pick a quarrel with me? Do you want to make me lose my temper? I shall refuse you that satisfaction. You have been a coward, and you want to frighten some one before you go to bed to make up for it. Touch me and I'll kill you, but I propose not to notice your animadversions. Have you anything to say? No? Well, then, good evening." And Major Luttrel started away.

It was with white rage that Richard was dumb. Had he been but a cat's-paw after all? Heaven forbid! He sat irresolute for an instant, and then turned suddenly and cantered back to Gertrude's gate. Here he stopped again; but after a short pause he went in over the gravel, with a fast-beating heart, wishing Luttrel had been there to see him. For a moment he fancied he heard the sound of the Major's returning steps. If he would

only come and find him at confession—it would be so easy to confess before him! He went along beside the house to the front, and stopped beneath the open window of the drawing-room.

"Gertrude!" he cried softly, from his saddle.

Gertrude immediately appeared. "Mercy—*you!*" she exclaimed.

Her voice was neither harsh nor sweet; but her words and her intonation recalled vividly to Richard's mind the scene in the conservatory, and they seemed to him keenly expressive of disappointment. He was invaded by a mischievous conviction that she had been expecting Captain Severn, or that at the least she had mistaken his voice for the Captain's. The truth is she had half imagined it might be—Richard's call having been little more than a loud whisper. The young man sat looking up at her, silent.

"What do you want?" she asked. "Can I do anything for you?"

Richard was not destined to do his duty that evening. A certain indefinable dryness of tone on Gertrude's part was the inevitable result of her finding that this whispered invocation came from poor Richard. She had been following her own thoughts. Captain Severn had told her a fortnight before that, in case of news of a defeat, he should not await the expiration of his leave of absence to return. Such news had now come, and it was clear to her that her friend would immediately take his departure. Naturally he would come and bid her farewell, and still more naturally she had her vision of what might pass

between them at such a crisis. To tell the whole truth, it was under the pressure of these reflections that, twenty minutes before, Gertrude had dismissed our two gentlemen. That this long story should be told in the dozen words with which she greeted Richard will seem strange to the disinterested reader. But in those words poor Richard, with a lover's clairvoyance, read it at a single glance. The same rush of resentment, the same sinking of the heart that he had felt in the conservatory took possession of him once more. To be witness of Severn's passion for Gertrude—that he could endure. To be witness of Gertrude's passion for Severn—against that obligation his reason rebelled.

"What is it you wish, Richard?" Gertrude repeated. "Have you forgotten anything?"

"Nothing—nothing!" cried the young man. "It's no matter."

He gave a great pull at his bridle, and almost brought his horse back on his haunches, and then, wheeling him about on himself, he thrust in his spurs and galloped out of the gate.

On the highway he came upon Major Luttrel, who stood looking down the lane.

"I'm going to the devil, sir!" cried Richard. "Give me your hand on it."

Luttrel held out his hand. "My poor young man," said he, "you are quite out of your mind. I'm sorry for you. You haven't been making a fool of yourself?"

"I haven't made it better—I have made it worse!"

Luttrel didn't quite understand, but he breathed more freely. "You had better go home and go to bed," he said. "You will make yourself ill by all these gyrations."

"I—I'm afraid to go home," said Richard, in a broken voice. "For God's sake, come with me!" —and the wretched fellow burst into tears. "I am too bad for any company but yours," he cried, in his sobs.

The Major winced, but he took pity. "Come, come," said he, "we shall wriggle through. I will go home with you."

They rode off together. That night Richard went to bed miserably drunk; although Major Luttrel had left him at ten o'clock, adjuring him to drink no more. He awoke the next morning in a violent fever; and before evening the doctor, whom one of his hired men had brought to his bedside, had come and looked grave and pronounced him very ill.

VI.

In country districts, where life is quiet, small accidents loom large; and accordingly Captain Severn's sudden departure for his regiment became very rapidly known among Gertrude's neighbours. She herself heard it from her coachman, who had heard it in the village, where the Captain had been seen to take the early train. She received the news calmly enough to outward appearance, but a great tumult rose and died in her breast. He had gone without a word of farewell! Perhaps in the

hurry of sudden preparation he had not had time to call upon her. Still, bare civility would have dictated his dropping her a line of writing—he who must have read in her eyes the feeling which her lips refused to utter, and who had been indebted to her for considerable attentions. It was not often that Gertrude threw back into her friends' teeth their acceptance of the hospitality which it had been placed in her power to offer them ; but if she now mutely reproached Captain Severn with ingratitude, it was because he had failed further than in appearing to forget what she had done for him —he had also lost all remembrance of the way she had done it. It is but natural to expect that our dearest friends will give us credit for our deepest feelings ; and Gertrude had constituted Edmund Severn her dearest friend. She had not, indeed, asked his assent to this arrangement, but she had made it the occasion of all kinds of tacit vows ; she had given him the flower of her womanly charity, and, when his moment came, he had turned from her without a look. Gertrude shed no tears. It seemed to her that she had given her friend tears enough, and that to expend her soul in weeping would be to waste something that was now too precious. She would think no more of Edmund Severn. He should be as little to her for the future as she was to him.

It was very easy to make this resolution : to keep it Gertrude found another matter. She could not think of the war, she could not talk with her neighbours of current events, she could not take up a newspaper, without reverting to her

absent friend. She was haunted with the idea that he had not allowed himself time really to recover, and that a fortnight's exposure would send him back to the hospital. At last it occurred to her that common decency required that she should make a call upon Mrs. Martin, the Captain's sister; and a vague impression that this lady might be the depositary of some farewell message —perhaps of a letter—which she was awaiting her convenience to present, led her at once to undertake this social duty. The carriage which had been ordered for her projected visit was at the door when, within a week after Severn's departure, Major Luttrel was announced. Gertrude received him in her bonnet. His first care was to present Captain Severn's message of good-bye, together with his regrets that he had not had a spare moment to come and see her. As Luttrel performed this office he watched his hostess narrowly, and was considerably reassured by the unflinching composure with which she listened to it. The turn he had given to Severn's farewell had been the fruit of much mischievous cogitation. It had seemed to him that, for his purposes, to represent the absent officer as alluding hastily and mechanically to Miss Whittaker would be better than to represent him as not alluding at all, for that would have left a boundless void for the exercise of Gertrude's fancy. And he had reasoned well; for although he was tempted to infer from her calmness that his shot had fallen short of the mark, yet in spite of her silent and almost smiling assent to his words it had made but one bound to

her heart. Before many minutes she felt that Captain Severn's excuse had done her a world of good. "He had not a spare moment!" Indeed, as she took to herself its full expression of indifference, she felt that her hard, forced smile was deepening into a sign of lively gratitude to the Major.

Major Luttrel had still another task to perform. He had spent half-an-hour on the preceding day at Richard's bedside, having ridden over to the farm, in ignorance of his illness, to see how matters stood with him. The reader will already have surmised that the Major was not a person of fastidious delicacy: he will therefore be the less surprised and shocked to hear that the sight of the poor young man—prostrate, fevered, delirious, and to all appearance rapidly growing worse—filled him with an emotion by no means akin to despair. In plain terms, he was very glad to find Richard a prisoner in bed. He had been racking his brains for a scheme to keep his young friend out of the way, and now, to his exceeding satisfaction, the doctors relieved him of this troublesome care. If Richard was booked for typhoid fever, which his symptoms seemed to indicate, he would not, even assuming that he should get well, be able to leave his room for many weeks. In a month much might be done; with energy everything might be done. The reader has been all but directly informed that the Major's present purpose was to possess himself of Miss Whittaker's confidence, hand and fortune. He had no money and he had many needs, and he was so well advanced

in life—being thirty-six years of age—that he had no heart to think of building up by slow degrees a career which had not yet taken the luxurious shape he desired. A man of refined tastes, too, he had become sensible, as he approached middle age, of the many advantages of a well-appointed home. He had therefore decided that a wealthy marriage would spread the carpet of repose. A girl of rather a fainter outline than Gertrude would have been the woman—we cannot say of his heart; but, as he argued, beggars can't be choosers. Gertrude was a young lady with standards of her own; but, on the whole, he was not afraid of her—he was abundantly prepared to do his duty. He had, of course, as became a man of observation, duly weighed his drawbacks against his advantages; and after all his arithmetic there was a balance in his favour. The only serious difficulty in his path was the possibility that, on hearing of Richard's illness, Gertrude, with her confounded benevolence, would take a fancy to nurse him in person, and that in the course of her ministrations his delirious ramblings would force upon her mind the damning story of the deception practised upon Captain Severn. There was nothing for it but boldly to face this risk. As for that other fact, which many men of a feebler spirit would have deemed an invincible obstacle, Luttrel's masterly understanding had immediately converted it into the prime agent of success—the fact, namely, that Gertrude's affections were already engaged. Such knowledge as he possessed of the relations between Miss Whittaker and his comrade

in the Volunteers he had gained by simply watching and taking little notes. These had been numerous, and on the whole his knowledge was accurate. It was at least what he might have termed a good working knowledge. He had calculated on a passionate reactionary impulse on Gertrude's part, consequent on Severn's apparent delinquency. He knew that in a generous woman such an impulse, if left to itself, would not go very far; but on this point it was that his policy bore. He would not leave it to itself: he would take it gently into his hands, spin it out, play upon it, and mould it into a clue which should lead him to the point he wanted to reach. He thus counted much upon his skill and his tact; but he likewise placed a becoming degree of reliance upon his fine personal qualities—qualities a little too stiff and solid perhaps to be called charms, but thoroughly adapted to inspire confidence. The Major was not a handsome fellow; he left that to people who hadn't the beauty of cleverness: but his ugliness was of a masculine, aristocratic, intelligent stamp. His figure, moreover, was good enough to compensate for the absence of a straight nose and a fine mouth; and he looked like a man of action who was at the same time a man of culture and of society.

In her sudden anxiety on Richard's behalf Gertrude soon forgot her selfish heart-ache. The carriage which was to have conveyed her to Mrs. Martin's was used for a more disinterested purpose. The Major, prompted by a strong faith in the salutary force of his own presence, having

obtained her permission to accompany her, they set out for the farm and soon found themselves in Richard's darkened room. The young man was immersed in a sleep from which it was judged imprudent to arouse him. Gertrude, sighing as she compared his bare bedroom with her own upholstered quarters, drew up a mental list of objects indispensable which she would immediately send him. Not that he had not received, however, a sufficiency of homely care. The doctor was assiduous, and old Mrs. Catching full of rough good-sense.

"He asks very often after you, Miss," she said, addressing Gertrude, but with a sly glance at the Major. "But I think you had better not come too often. I am afraid you would work him up more than you would quiet him."

"I am afraid you would, Miss Whittaker," remarked the Major, who could have hugged Mrs. Catching.

"Why should I work him up?" asked Gertrude. "I am used to sick-rooms. I nursed my father for a year and a half."

"Oh, it's very well for an old woman like me, but it's no place for a fine young lady with a tail to her gown," said the goodwife, looking at Gertrude's muslins and laces.

"I am not so fine as to desert a friend in distress," said Gertrude. "I shall come again, and if it makes the poor fellow worse to see me, I shall stay away. I am ready to do anything that will help him to get well."

It had already occurred to her that in his

unnatural state Richard might find her presence a source of irritation, and she was prepared to remain in the background. As she returned to her carriage she caught herself reflecting with so much pleasure upon Major Luttrel's kindness in expending a couple of hours of his valuable time on so unprofitable an object that, by way of expressing her satisfaction, she invited him to come home and dine with her.

After a short interval she paid Richard a second visit, in company with Miss Pendexter. He was a great deal worse; he lay there emaciated, exhausted, stupid; the issue seemed very doubtful. Gertrude immediately pushed on to the county-town, which was larger than her own, sought out a professional nurse, and arranged with her to relieve Mrs. Catching, who was worn out with sitting-up. For a fortnight, moreover, she received constant tidings from the young man's physician. During this fortnight Major Luttrel carried on his siege.

It may be said, to his credit, that he had by no means conducted his suit upon that narrow programme which he had drawn up at the outset. He very soon discovered that Gertrude's rancour —if rancour there was—was a substance impalpable to any tactile process that he was master of, and he had accordingly set to work to woo her like an honest man, from day to day, from hour to hour, trusting so devoutly for success to momentary inspiration that he felt his suit dignified by a certain flattering *faux air* of genuine passion. He occasionally reminded himself, how-

ever, that he might really be more indebted to the favour of accidental contrast than Gertrude's life-long reserve—for it was certain she would not depart from it—would ever allow him to measure.

It was as an honest man, then—a man of impulse and of action—that Gertrude had begun to like him. She was not slow to perceive what he was "after," as they said in that part of the world; and she was almost tempted at times to tell him frankly that she would spare him the intermediate steps and meet him at the goal without further delay. She knew very well that she should never fall in love with him, but it was conceivable she might live with him happily. An immense weariness had somehow come upon her, and a sickening sense of loneliness. A vague suspicion that her money had done her an incurable wrong inspired her with a profound disgust for the care of it. She felt cruelly hedged out from human sympathy by her bristling possessions. "If I had had five hundred dollars a year," she said, in a frequent parenthesis, "I might have pleased him." Hating her wealth, accordingly, and chilled by her isolation, the temptation was strong upon her to give herself up to this wise, brave gentleman who seemed to have adopted such a happy medium betwixt loving her for her fortune and fearing her for it. Would she not always stand between men who would represent the two extremes? She should make herself decently secure by an alliance with Major Luttrel.

One evening, on presenting himself, Luttrel

read these thoughts so clearly in her eyes that he made up his mind to speak. But his mind was burdened with a couple of facts of which it was necessary that he should disembarrass it before it could enjoy the freedom of action the occasion required. In the first place, then, he had been over to see Richard Maule, and had found him suddenly and unexpectedly better. It was unbecoming, however—it was impossible—that he should allow Gertrude to dwell long on this pleasant announcement.

"I tell the good news first," he said, gravely. "I have some very bad news, too, Miss Whittaker."

Gertrude sent him a rapid glance. "Some one has been killed?"

"Captain Severn has been shot," said the Major —"shot by a beastly guerilla."

Gertrude was silent—no answer seemed possible to that immitigable fact. She sat with her head on her hand and her elbow on the table beside her, looking at the figures in the carpet. She uttered no words of commonplace regret, but she felt as little capable of giving way to serious grief. She had lost nothing, and, to the best of her knowledge, *he* had lost nothing. She had an old loss to mourn—a loss a month old, which she had mourned as she might. To surrender herself to passion now would have been but to impugn the sincerity of what had already taken place in her mind. When she looked up at her companion she was outwardly calm, though I must add that a single glance of her eye directed him not to presume upon it. She was aware that

this glance betrayed her secret; but in view both of Severn's death and of the Major's position such revelations were of little moment. Luttrel had prepared to act upon her hint, and to avert himself gently from the topic, when Gertrude, who had dropped her eyes again, raised them with a slight shudder. "I am very cold," she murmured. "Will you shut that window beside you, Major? Or stay, suppose you give me my shawl from the sofa."

Luttrel brought the shawl, placed it on her shoulders, and sat down beside her. "These are cruel times," he said, with studied simplicity. "It is always the best that are taken."

"Yes, they are cruel times," Gertrude answered. "They make one feel cruel. They make one doubt of all one has learnt from one's pastors and masters."

"Yes, but they teach us something new also."

"I am sure I don't know," said Gertrude, whose heart was so full of bitterness that she felt almost malignant. "They teach us how mean we are. War is an infamy, Major, though it *is* your trade. It's very well for you, who look at it professionally, and for those who go and fight; but it's a miserable business for those who stay at home, and do the thinking and the—the *missing!* It's a miserable business for women; it makes us more spiteful than ever."

"Well, a little spite isn't a bad thing, in practice," said the Major. "War is certainly an abomination, both at home and in the field. But as wars go, Miss Whittaker, our own is a very

satisfactory one. It involves important issues. It won't leave us as it found us. We are in the midst of a revolution, and what is a revolution but a turning upside down? It makes sad work with our habits and theories—our traditions and convictions. But, on the other hand," Luttrel pursued, warming to his task, "it leaves something untouched which is better than these—I mean our capacity to *feel*, Miss Whittaker." And the Major paused until he had caught Gertrude's eyes, when, having engaged them with his own, he proceeded. "I think that is the stronger for the downfall of so much else, and, upon my soul, I think it's in that we ought to take refuge. Don't you think so?"

"To feel what?" Gertrude inquired.

"Affection, admiration, hope!" said the Major. "I don't advocate fiddling while Rome is burning, you know. In fact, it's only poor unsatisfied devils that are tempted to fiddle. There is one sentiment which is respectable and honourable, and even sacred, at all times and in all places, whatever they may be. It doesn't depend upon circumstances, but they upon it; and with its help, I think, we are a match for any circumstances. I don't mean religion, Miss Whittaker," added the Major, with a significant smile.

"If you don't mean religion," said Gertrude, "I suppose you mean love. That's a very different thing."

"Yes, a very different thing; so I have always thought, and so I am glad to hear you say. Some people, you know, mix them up in the

most extraordinary fashion. I don't regard myself as an especially religious man; in fact I believe I am rather remiss in that way. It's my nature. Half mankind are born so, or I suppose the affairs of this world wouldn't move. But I believe I am a good lover, Miss Whittaker."

"I hope for your own sake you are, Major Luttrel."

"Thank you. Do you think now you could entertain the idea for the sake of any one else?"

Gertrude neither dropped her eyes, nor shrugged her shoulders, nor blushed, nor whimpered. If anything, indeed, she turned somewhat paler than before, as she sustained her companion's gaze and prepared to answer him as directly as she might.

"If I loved you, Major Luttrel, I should value the idea for my own sake."

The Major, too, blanched a little. "I put my question conditionally," he answered, "and I have got, as I deserved, a conditional reply. I will speak plainly, then, Miss Whittaker. *Do* you value the fact for your own sake? It would be plainer still to say, Do you love me? but I confess I am not brave enough for that. I will say, Can you? or I will even content myself with putting it in the conditional again, and asking you if you could; although, after all, I hardly know what the *if* understood can reasonably refer to. I am not such a fool as to ask of any woman—least of all of you—to love me contingently. You can only answer for the present, and say yes or no. I shouldn't trouble you to say either if I didn't conceive that I had given you time to make up

your mind. It doesn't take for ever to know Robert Luttrel. I am not one of the great unfathomable ones. We have seen each other more or less intimately for a good many weeks; and as I am conscious, Miss Whittaker, of having shown you my best, I take for granted that if you don't fancy me now you won't a month hence, when you shall have seen my faults. Yes, Miss Whittaker, I can solemnly say," continued the Major, with genuine feeling, "I have shown you my best, as every man is in honour bound to do who approaches a woman with those predispositions with which I have approached you. I have striven hard to please you"—and he paused. "I can only say, I hope I have succeeded."

"I should be very insensible if all your kindness and your politeness had been lost upon me," Gertrude said.

"In heaven's name don't talk about politeness!" cried the Major.

"I am deeply conscious of your devotion, and I am very much obliged to you for urging your claims so respectfully and considerately. I speak seriously, Major Luttrel," pursued Gertrude. "There is a happy medium of expression, and you have taken it. Now it seems to me that there is a happy medium of affection, with which you might be content. I don't love you—no, not at all. I question my heart, and it gives me that answer. The feeling that I have is not a feeling to work prodigies."

"May it at least work the prodigy of allowing you to be my wife?"

Gertrude was silent a moment. "If you can respect a woman who gives you her hand in cold blood, you are welcome to mine."

Luttrel moved his chair and took her hand. "Beggars can't be choosers," said he, raising it to his moustache.

"Oh, Major Luttrel, don't say that," she answered. "I give you a great deal; but I keep a little—a little," said Gertrude, hesitating, "which I suppose I shall give to God."

"Well, I shall not be jealous," said Luttrel.

"The rest I give to you, and in return I ask a great deal."

"I shall give you all."

"No, I don't want more than I give," said Gertrude.

"But, pray," asked Luttrel, with an insinuating smile, "what am I to do with the difference?"

"You had better keep it for yourself. What I want is your protection, sir, your advice, your support. I want you to take me away from this place, even if you have to take me down to the army. I want to see the world under the shelter of your name. I shall give you a great deal of trouble. I am a mere mass of possessions: what I am is nothing to what I have. But ever since I began to grow up, what I am has been the slave of what I have. I am weary of my chains, and you must help me to carry them." And Gertrude rose to her feet, as if to inform the Major that his audience was at an end.

He still held her right hand; she gave him the other. He stood looking down at her, an image

of manly humility, while from his silent breast went up a thanksgiving to favouring fortune.

At the pressure of his hands Gertrude felt her bosom heave. She burst into tears. "Oh, you must be very kind to me!" she cried, as he put his arm about her, and she dropped her head upon his shoulder.

VII.

WHEN once Richard's health had taken a turn for the better, it began very rapidly to improve. "Until he is quite well," Gertrude said one day to her accepted suitor, "I should like him to hear nothing about our engagement. He was once in love with me himself," she added, very frankly. "Did you ever suspect it? But I hope he will have got better of that sad malady, too. Nevertheless, I shall expect nothing reasonable from him until he is quite strong; and as he may hear of my new intentions from other people, I propose that, for the present, we confide them to no one."

"But if he asks me point-blank," said the Major, "what shall I answer?"

"It's not likely he will ask you. How should he suspect anything?"

"Oh," said Luttrel, "that gentleman is one of your suspicious kind."

"Tell him we are not engaged then. A woman in my position may say what she pleases."

It was agreed, however, that certain preparations for the marriage should meanwhile go forward in

secret, and that the ceremony itself should take place in August, as Luttrel expected to be ordered back into service in the autumn. At about this moment Gertrude was surprised to receive a short note from Richard, so feebly scrawled in pencil as to be barely legible. "Dear Gertrude," it ran, "don't come to see me just yet. I'm not fit to be seen. You would hurt me, and I should shock you. God bless you! R. MAULE." Miss Whittaker explained his request to herself by the supposition that a report had come to him of Major Luttrel's late assiduities (which it was impossible should go unobserved); that, leaping at the worst, he had taken her engagement for granted; and that, under this impression, he could not trust himself to see her. She despatched him an answer, telling him that she would await his pleasure, and that, if the doctor would consent to his having letters, she would meanwhile occasionally write to him. "She will give me good advice," thought Richard impatiently; and on this point, accordingly, she received no account of his wishes. Expecting to leave her house and close it on her marriage, she spent many hours in wandering sadly over the meadow-paths and through the woodlands which she had known from her childhood. She had thrown aside the last ensigns of filial regret, and now walked, sad and splendid, in bright colours which those who knew her well must have regarded as a kind of self-defiance. It would have seemed to a stranger that, for a woman who had freely chosen a companion for life, she was curiously spiritless and sombre. As

she looked at her pale cheeks and dull eyes in the mirror she felt ashamed that she had no fairer countenance to offer to her destined lord. She had lost her single beauty, her smile, and she would make but a ghastly figure at the altar. "I ought to wear a calico dress and an apron," she said to herself, "and not this glaring finery." But she continued to wear her finery, and to lay out her money, and to perform all her old duties to the letter. After the lapse of what she deemed a sufficient interval she went to see Mrs. Martin, and to listen dumbly to her narration of her brother's death and to her simple eulogies.

Major Luttrel performed his part quite as bravely, and much more successfully. He observed neither too many things nor too few; he neither presumed upon his success nor hung back from the next steps. Having, on his side, received no prohibition from Richard, he made his way back to the farm, trusting that with the return of reason his young friend might be disposed to renew that anomalous alliance in which, on the hapless evening of Captain Severn's farewell, he had taken refuge against his despair. In the long, languid hours of his early convalescence Richard had found time to survey his position, to summon back piece by piece the immediate past, and to frame a general scheme for the future. But more vividly than anything else there had finally disengaged itself from his meditations a kind of horror of Robert Luttrel.

It was in this humour that the Major found him; and as he looked at the young man's gaunt

shoulders, supported by pillows, at his face, so livid and aquiline, at his great dark eyes, which seemed to shine with the idea of their possessor's taking a fresh start, it struck him that an invincible spirit had been sent from a better world to breathe confusion upon his hopes. If Richard hated the Major, the reader may guess whether the Major loved Richard. Luttrel was amazed at his first remark.

"I suppose you have got her by this time," Richard said, calmly enough.

"Not quite," answered the Major. "There's a chance for you yet."

To this Richard made no rejoinder. Then, suddenly, "Have you had any news of Captain Severn?" he asked.

For a moment the Major was perplexed at his question. He had supposed that the news of Severn's death would have come to Richard's ears, and he had been half curious, half apprehensive as to its affect. But an instant's reflection now assured him that the young man's estrangement from his neighbours had kept him hitherto, and might still keep him, in ignorance of the truth. Hastily, therefore, and inconsiderately, the Major determined to make this ignorance last a little longer; it was always so much gained. "No," said he, "I have had no news. Severn and I are not on writing terms."

The next time Luttrel came to the farm he found the master sitting up in a cushioned, chintz-covered arm-chair, which Gertrude had sent him the day before out of her own dressing-room.

"Have you got her yet?" asked Richard.

The note of provocation in his tone was so strong that the Major ceased to temporise. "Yes, I have 'got' her, as you elegantly express it. We are engaged to be married."

The young man's face betrayed no emotion.

"Are you reconciled to it?" asked Luttrel.

"Yes—so far as doing anything goes."

"What in the name of all that's conceited could you do? Explain yourself."

"A man in my state can't explain himself. I mean that, however much I hate you, I shall accept Gertrude's marriage."

"It will be very kind of you. And you will be a wise man," the Major added.

"I am growing wise. I feel like Solomon on his throne, in this chair. But I confess, sir, I don't see how she could have you."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," said the Major, good-humouredly.

"Yes, but I thought hers was better."

They came to no more express understanding than this with regard to the future. Richard continued to grow stronger, and to put off, in the same measure, the renewal of his intercourse with Gertrude. A month before he would have resented as an insult the intimation that he should ever be so resigned to lose her as he found himself now. He would not see her for two reasons: first, because he felt that it would be—or that at least, in reason, it ought to be—a painful experience to look upon his old mistress with a coldly critical eye; and secondly, because, justify to himself as he would his new-born indifference, he

could not entirely cast away the suspicion that it was a last remnant of disease, and that, when he stood on his legs again under the sky and among those natural things with which he had long since established a sort of sensuous communion, he would feel, as with a tumultuous rush, the return of his impetuous manhood and of his old capacity. When he had smoked a pipe in the outer sunshine, when he had settled himself once more to the long elastic bound of his mare, then he would see Gertrude. The reason of the change which had come upon him was that she had disappointed him—she who had used to seem to him above his measure altogether. She had accepted Major Luttrel, a man whom he despised; she had so mutilated her magnificent nature as to match it with his. The validity of his dislike to the Major, Richard did not trouble himself to examine. He accepted it as an unerring instinct; and, indeed, he might have asked himself, had he not sufficient proof? Moreover he laboured under the sense of a gratuitous wrong. He had suffered a great torment of remorse to drive him into brutishness, and thence to the very gates of death, for an offence which he had deemed mortal, and which was, after all, but a phantasm of his excited conscience. What a fool he had been—a fool for his passionate fears, and a fool for his penitence! Marriage with Major Luttrel—such was the end of Gertrude's imagined anguish. Such, too, we hardly need add, was the end of that idea of reparation which had been so formidable to Luttrel. Richard had been generous; he would now be just.

Far from impeding his recovery, these reflections hastened it. One morning in the beginning of August Gertrude received notice that he was in her house. It was a still, sultry day, and Miss Whittaker, her habitual pallor deepened by the oppressive heat, was sitting alone, in a white morning-dress, languidly fanning aside at once the droning flies and her equally importunate thoughts. She found the young man standing in the middle of the drawing-room, booted and spurred.

"Well, Richard," she exclaimed, with some feeling, "at last you are willing to see me!"

As his eyes fell upon her he started and stood almost paralysed, heeding neither her words nor her extended hand. It was not Gertrude he saw, but her ghost.

"In heaven's name, what has happened to you?" he cried. "Have *you* been sick too?"

Gertrude tried to smile, in feigned surprise at his surprise; but her muscles relaxed. Richard's words and looks reflected more vividly than any mirror the blighted state of her person, the extreme misery of her soul. She felt herself growing faint. She moved backward to a sofa, and sank down.

Then Richard felt as if the room were revolving about him and his throat were choked with imprecations—as if his old extravagant passion had again taken possession of him, like a mingled legion of devils and angels. It was through the most unexpected pity that his love returned. He went forward and dropped on his knees at Gertrude's feet. "Speak to me!" he cried, seizing

her hands. "Are you unhappy? Is your heart broken? Oh Gertrude! what have you come to?"

Gertrude drew her hands from his grasp and rose to her feet. "Get up, Richard," she said. "Don't talk so wildly. I am not well. I am very glad to see you. *You* look well."

"I have got my strength again—and meanwhile you have been failing. You are unhappy, you are wretched! Don't say you are not, Gertrude: it's as plain as day. You are breaking your heart."

"The same old Richard!" said Gertrude, trying to smile again.

"Would that you were the same old Gertrude! Don't try to smile; you can't!"

"I *shall!*" said Gertrude, desperately. "I am going to be married, you know."

"Yes, I know. I don't congratulate you."

"I have not counted upon that honour, Richard. I shall have to do without it."

"You will have to do without a great many things!" cried Richard, horrified by what seemed to him her blind self-immolation.

"I have all I ask," said Gertrude.

"You haven't all *I* ask, then! You haven't all your friends ask."

"My friends are very kind, but I marry to suit myself."

"You have not suited yourself!" retorted the young man. "You have suited—God knows what! —your pride, your despair, your desolation!" As he looked at her the secret history of her weakness seemed to become plain to him, and he felt a

desire to throttle the man who had taken a base advantage of it. "Gertrude!" he cried, "I entreat you to go back. It's not for my sake—I'll give you up—I'll go a thousand miles away, and never look at you again. It's for your own. In the name of your happiness, break with that man! Don't fling yourself away. Buy him off, if you consider yourself bound. Give him your money. That's all he wants."

As Gertrude listened the blood came back to her face and two flames into her eyes. She looked at Richard from head to foot. "You are not weak," she said, "you are in your senses, you are well and strong; you shall tell me what you mean. You insult the best friend I have. Explain yourself! you insinuate odious things—speak them out!" Her eyes glanced toward the door, and Richard's followed them. Major Luttrel stood on the threshold.

"Come in, sir!" cried Richard. "Gertrude swears she will believe no harm of you. Come and tell her that she's wrong! How can you keep on persecuting a woman whom you have brought to this state? Think of what she was three months ago, and look at her now!"

Luttrel received this broadside without flinching; he had overheard Richard's voice from the hall, and he had steeled his heart for the encounter. He assumed the air of having been so amazed by the young man's first words as only to have heard his last; and he glanced at Gertrude mechanically, as if to comply with them. "What's the matter?" he asked, going over to her and taking her hand;

"are you ill?" Gertrude let him have her hand, but she forbore to meet his eyes.

"Ill! of course she's ill!" cried Richard, passionately. "She's dying—she's consuming herself! I know I seem to be playing an odious part here, Gertrude, but, upon my soul, I can't help it. I look like a betrayer, an informer, a sneak, but I don't feel like one! Still, I will leave you, if you say so."

"Shall he go, Gertrude?" asked Luttrel, without looking at Richard.

"No. Let him stay and explain himself. He has accused you—let him prove his case."

"I know what he is going to say," said Luttrel. "It will place me in a bad light. Do you still wish to hear it?"

Gertrude drew her hand hastily out of Luttrel's. "Speak, Richard!" she cried, with a passionate gesture.

"Ah, you won't enjoy it," said Richard. "Gertrude, I have done you a vile wrong. How great a wrong I never knew until I saw you to-day so miserably altered. When I heard that you were to be married I fancied that it didn't matter much, and that my remorse had been wasted. But I understand it now, and *he* understands it too. You once told me that you had ceased to love Captain Severn. It wasn't true—you never ceased to love him—you love him at this moment. If he were to get another wound in the next battle, how would you feel—how would you bear that?" And Richard paused for an instant, with the force of his interrogation.

"For God's sake," said Gertrude, "respect the dead!"

"The dead! Is he dead?"

Gertrude covered her face with her hands.

"You beast!" cried Luttrel.

Richard turned upon him savagely. "You're a precious one to talk!" he roared. "You told me he was alive and well!"

Gertrude made a movement of speechless distress.

"You would have it, my dear," said Luttrel, in a superior tone.

Richard had turned pale, he began to tremble. "Excuse me, Gertrude," he said, hoarsely, "I have been deceived. Poor, unhappy woman! Gertrude," he continued, going nearer to her and speaking in a whisper, "*I* killed him."

Gertrude fell back from him, as he approached her, with a look of unutterable horror. "I and *he*," Richard went on, pointing at Luttrel.

Gertrude's eyes followed the direction of his gesture, and transferred their scorching disgust to her suitor. This was too much for Luttrel's courage. "You eternal tormentor," she moaned at Richard, "speak out!"

"He loved you, though you believed he didn't," said Richard. "I saw it the first time I looked at him. To every one but you it was as plain as day. Major Luttrel saw it too. But he was too modest, and he never believed you cared for him. The night before he went back to the army he came to bid you good-bye. If he had seen you it would have been better for every one. You

remember that evening, of course. We met him, Luttrel and I. He was all on fire—he meant to speak. I knew it; you knew it, Luttrel: it was in his fingers' ends. I intercepted him. I turned him off—I lied to him and told him you were absent from home. I was a coward, and I did neither more nor less than that. I knew you were waiting for him. It was stronger than my will—I believe I should do it again. Fate was against him, and he went off. I came back to tell you, but my damnable jealousy strangled me. I went home and drank myself into a fever. I have done you a wrong that I can never repair. I would go hang myself if I thought it would help you." Richard spoke slowly, softly, explicitly, as if irresistible Justice in person had her hand upon his neck and were forcing him down upon his knees. In the presence of Gertrude's dismay nothing seemed possible but perfect self-conviction. In Luttrel's attitude, as he stood with his head erect, his arms folded, and his cold gray eye fixed upon the distance, it struck him that there was something atrociously insolent; not insolent to him—for that he cared little enough—but insolent to Gertrude and to the dreadful solemnity of the hour. Richard sent the Major a look of the most aggressive contempt. "As for Major Luttrel," he said, "*he* was but a passive spectator. No, Gertrude, by heaven!" he burst out; "he was worse than I! I loved you, and he didn't!"

"Our friend is correct in his facts, Gertrude," said Luttrel, quietly. "He is incorrect in his enferences. I *was* a passive spectator of his

deception. He appeared to enjoy a certain authority with regard to your wishes—the source of which I respected both of you sufficiently never to question—and I accepted the act which he has described as an exercise of it. You will remember that you had sent us away on the ground that you were in no humour for company. To represent you, therefore, to another visitor as absent seemed to me rather officious, but still pardonable. You will consider that I was wholly ignorant of your relations to that visitor; that whatever you may have done for others, Gertrude, to me you never vouchsafed a word of information on the subject, and that Mr. Maule's words are a revelation to me. But I am bound to believe nothing that he says. I am bound to believe that I have injured you only when I hear it from your own lips."

Richard made a movement as if to break out upon the Major; but Gertrude, who had been standing motionless, with her eyes upon the ground, quickly raised them, and gave him a look of imperious prohibition. She had listened, and she had chosen. She turned to Luttrel. "Major Luttrel," she said, "you *have* been accessory to something that has been for me a very serious pain. It is my duty to tell you so. I mean, of course, a perfectly unwilling accessory. I pity you more than I can tell you. I think your position more pitiable than mine. It is true that I never made a confidant of you. I never made one of Richard. I had a secret, and he surprised it. You were less fortunate." It might have seemed to a dispassionate observer that in these last four words there was an infinitesi-

mal touch of tragic irony. Gertrude paused a moment while Luttrel eyed her intently, and Richard, from a somewhat tardy instinct of delicacy, walked over to the bow-window. "This is the most distressing moment of my life," she resumed. "I hardly know where my duty lies. The only thing that is plain to me is that I must ask you to release me from my engagement. I ask it most humbly, Major Luttrel," Gertrude continued, with warmth in her words and a chilling coldness in her voice — a coldness which it sickened her to feel there, but which she was unable to dispel. "I can't expect that you should give me up easily; I know that it's a great deal to ask, and "—she forced the chosen words out of her mouth—"I should thank you more than I can say if you would put some condition upon my release. You have done honourably by me, and I repay you with ingratitude. But I can't marry you." Her voice began to melt. "I have been false from the beginning. I have no heart to give you. I should make you a despicable wife."

The Major, too, had listened and chosen, and in this trying conjuncture he set the seal to his character as an accomplished man. He saw that Gertrude's movement was final, and he determined not to protest against the inscrutable. He read in the glance of her eye and the tone of her voice that the perfect dignity had fallen from his character—that his integrity had lost its bloom; but he also read her firm resolve never to admit this fact to her own mind nor to declare it to the world, and he was gratified by her forbearance. His

hopes, his ambitions, his visions, lay before him like a heap of broken glass; but he would be as graceful as she was. She had divined him, but she had spared him. The Major was inspired.

"You have at least spoken to the point," he said. "You leave no room for doubt or for hope. With the little light I have I can't say I understand your feelings, but I yield to them religiously. I believe so thoroughly that you suffer from the thought of what you ask of me that I will not increase your suffering by assuring you of my own. I care for nothing but your happiness. You have lost it, and I give you mine to replace it. And although it's a simple thing to say," he added, "I must remark that I thank you for your implicit faith in my integrity." And he held out his hand. As she gave him hers Gertrude felt horribly in the wrong; and she looked into his eyes with an expression, so humble, so appealing, so grateful, that, after all, his exit may be called triumphant.

When he had gone Richard turned from the window with a tremendous sense of relief. He had heard Gertrude's speech, and he knew that perfect justice had not been done; but still there was enough to be thankful for. Yet now that his duty was accomplished, he was conscious of a sudden lassitude. Mechanically he looked at Gertrude, and almost mechanically he came towards her. She, on her side, looking at him as he walked slowly down the long room, his face indistinct against the deadened light of the white-draped windows behind him, marked the expression of his figure with another pang. "He has

rescued me," she said to herself; "but his passion has perished in the tumult. Richard," she said aloud, uttering the first words of vague kindness that came into her mind, "I forgive you."

Richard stopped. The idea had lost its charm. "You are very kind," he said, wearily. "You are far too kind. How do you know you forgive me? Wait and see."

Gertrude looked at him as she had never looked before; but he saw nothing of it. He saw a sad, plain girl, in a white dress, nervously handling her fan. He was thinking of himself. If he had been thinking of her he would have read in her lingering, upward gaze that he had won her; and if, so reading, he had opened his arms Gertrude would have come to them. We trust the reader is not shocked at this piece of information. She neither hated him nor despised him, as she ought doubtless in consistency to have done. She felt that there was a gallantry in him, after all, and in this new phase he pleased her. Richard, on his side, felt humbly the same truth, and he began to respect himself. The past had closed abruptly behind him, and poor tardy Gertrude had been shut in. The future was dimly shaping itself without her image. So he did not open his arms.

"Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand. "I may not see you again for a long time."

Gertrude felt as if the world were deserting her. "Are you going away?" she asked, tremulously.

"I mean to sell out and pay my debts, and go to the war."

She gave him her hand, and he silently shook

it. There was no contending against the war, and she gave him up.

With their separation my story properly ends, and to say more would be to begin a new story. It is perhaps my duty, however, expressly to add that Major Luttrel, in obedience to a logic of his own, abstained from revenge; and that, if time has not avenged him, it has at least rewarded him. General Luttrel, who lost an arm before the war was over, recently married Miss Van Winkel, of Philadelphia, and seventy thousand a year. Richard engaged in the defence of his country, with a commission in the Volunteers, obtained with much difficulty. He saw a great deal of fighting, but he has no scars to show. The return of peace found him in his native place, without a home and without resources. One of his first acts was to call dutifully and respectfully upon Miss Whittaker, whose circle of acquaintance was now much enlarged, and included even people who came from Boston to stay with her. Gertrude's manner was kindness itself, but a more studied kindness than before. She had lost much of her youth and her simplicity. Richard wondered whether she had pledged herself to spinsterhood, but of course he didn't ask her. She inquired very particularly into his material prospects and intentions, and offered urgently to lend him money, which he declined to borrow. When he left her he took a long walk through her place and beside the river, and, wandering back to the days when he had yearned for her love, assured himself that no woman would ever

again be to him what she had been. During his stay in this neighbourhood he became reconciled to one of the old agricultural magnates whom he had insulted in his unregenerate days, and through whom he was glad to obtain some momentary employment. But his present position is very distasteful to him, and he is eager to try his fortunes in the West. As yet, however, he has lacked the means to emigrate with advantage. He drinks no more than is good for him. To speak of Gertrude's impressions of Richard would lead us quite too far. Shortly after his return she broke up her household, and came to the bold resolution (bold, that is, for a woman young, unmarried, and ignorant of manners in her own country) to spend some time in Europe. At our last accounts she was living in the ancient city of Florence. Her great wealth, of which she was wont to complain that it excluded her from human sympathy, now affords her a most efficient protection. She passes among her fellow-countrymen abroad for a very independent, but a very contented woman; although, as she is by this time nearly thirty years of age, some little romantic episode in the past is vaguely alluded to as accounting for her continued celibacy.

1867.

THE LAST OF THE VALERII.

I HAD had occasion to declare more than once that if my god-daughter married a foreigner I should refuse to give her away. And yet when the young Conte Valerio was presented to me, in Rome, as her accepted and plighted lover, I found myself looking at the happy fellow, after a momentary stare of amazement, with a certain paternal benevolence; thinking, indeed, that from the pictorial point of view (she with her yellow locks and he with his dusky ones) they were a strikingly well-assorted pair. She brought him up to me half proudly, half timidly, pushing him before her and begging me with one of her dove-like glances to be very polite. I don't know that I usually miss that effect, but she was so deeply impressed with his grandeur that she thought it impossible to do him honour enough. The Conte Valerio's grandeur was doubtless nothing for a young American girl who had the air and almost the habits of a princess, to sound her trumpet about; but she was desperately in love with him, and not only her heart, but her imagination, was touched. He was extremely handsome, and with a beauty which was less a matter of mere fortunate surface than usually happens in the handsome

Roman race. There was a latent tenderness in his admirable mask, and his grave, slow smile, if it suggested no great nimbleness of wit, spoke of a manly constancy which promised well for Martha's happiness. He had little of the light, inexpensive urbanity of his countrymen, and there was a kind of stupid sincerity in his gaze; it seemed to suspend response until he was sure he understood you. He was certainly a little dense, and I fancied that to a political or æsthetic question the response would be particularly slow. "He is good, and strong, and brave," the young girl however assured me; and I easily believed her. Strong the Conte Valerio certainly was; he had a head and throat like some of the busts in the Vatican. To my eye, which has looked at things now so long with the painter's purpose, it was a real annoyance to see such a throat rising out of the white cravat of the period. It sustained a head as massively round as that of the familiar bust of the Emperor Caracalla, and covered with the same dense sculptural crop of curls. The young man's hair grew superbly; it was such hair as the old Romans must have had when they walked bareheaded and bronzed about the world. It made a perfect arch over his low, clear forehead, and prolonged itself on cheek and chin in a close, crisp beard, strong with its own strength and unstiffened by the razor. Neither his nose nor his mouth was delicate; but they were powerful, shapely, masculine. His complexion was of a deep glowing brown, which no emotion would alter, and his large, lucid eyes seemed to stare at

you like a pair of polished agates. He was of middle stature, and his chest was of so generous a girth that you half expected to hear his linen crack with its even respirations. And yet, with his simple human smile, he looked neither like a young bullock nor a gladiator. His powerful voice was the least bit harsh, and his large, ceremonious reply to my compliment had the massive sonority with which civil speeches must have been uttered in the age of Augustus. I had always considered my god-daughter a very American little person, in all honourable meanings of the word, and I doubted if this sturdy young Latin would understand the transatlantic element in her nature; but, evidently, he would make her a loyal and ardent lover. She seemed to me, in her tinted prettiness, so tender, so appealing, so bewitching, that it was impossible to believe he had not more thoughts for all this than for the equally pretty fortune which it yet bothered me to believe that he must, like a good Italian, have taken the exact measure of. His own worldly goods consisted of the paternal estate, a villa within the walls of Rome, which his scanty funds had suffered to fall into sombre disrepair. "It's the Villa she's in love with, quite as much as the Count," said her mother. "She dreams of converting the Count; that's all very well. But she dreams of refurnishing the Villa!"

The upholsterers were turned into it, I believe, before the wedding, and there was a great scrubbing and sweeping of saloons and raking and weeding of alleys and avenues. Martha made

frequent visits of inspection while these ceremonies were taking place; but one day, on her return, she came into my little studio with an air of amusing horror. She had found them *scraping* the sarcophagus in the great ilex-walk; divesting it of its mossy coat, disincrusting it of the sacred green mould of the ages! This was their idea of making the Villa comfortable. She had made them transport it to the dampest place they could find; for, next after that slow-coming, slow-going smile of her lover, it was the rusty complexion of his patrimonial marbles that she most prized. The young Count's conversion proceeded less rapidly, and indeed I believe that his betrothed brought little zeal to the affair. She loved him so devoutly that she believed no change of faith could better him, and she would have been willing for his sake to say her prayers to the sacred Bambino at the feast of the Epiphany. But he had the good taste to demand no such sacrifice, and I was struck with the happy significance of a scene of which I was an accidental observer. It was at St. Peter's, one Friday afternoon, during the vesper-service which takes place in the chapel of the choir. I met my god-daughter wandering serenely on her lover's arm, her mother being established on her camp-stool, near the entrance of the place. The crowd was collected thereabouts, and the body of the church was empty. Now and then the high voices of the singers escaped into the outer vastness and melted slowly away in the incense-thickened air. Something in the young girl's step and the clasp of her arm in

her lover's told me that her contentment was perfect. As she threw back her head and gazed into the magnificent immensity of vault and dome, I felt that she was in that enviable mood in which all consciousness revolves on a single centre, and that her sense of the splendours around her was one with the ecstasy of her trust. They stopped before that sombre group of polyglot confessionals which proclaims so portentously the sinfulness of the world, and Martha seemed to make some almost passionate protestation. A few minutes later I overtook them.

"Don't you agree with me, dear friend," said the Count, who always addressed me with the most affectionate deference, "that before I marry so pure and sweet a creature as this, I ought to go into one of those places and confess every sin I ever was guilty of—every evil thought and impulse and desire of my grossly evil nature?"

Martha looked at him, half in deprecation, half in homage, with an eye which seemed at once to insist that her lover could have no vices and to plead that if he had there would be something magnificent in them. "Listen to him!" she said, smiling. "The list would be long, and if you waited to finish it, you would be late for the wedding. But if you confess your sins for me, it's only fair I should confess mine for you. Do you know what I have been saying to Marco?" she added, turning to me with the half-filial confidence she had always shown me and with a rosy glow in her cheeks; "that I want to do something more for him than girls commonly do for their

intended—to take some great step, to run some risk, to break some law, even! I am quite willing to change my religion, if he bids me. There are moments when I am terribly tired of simply staring at Catholicism; it will be a relief to come into a church to kneel. That, after all, is what they are meant for! Therefore, Marco mio, if it casts a shade across your heart to think that I'm a heretic, I will go and kneel down to that good old priest who has just entered the confessional yonder, and say to him, 'My father, I repent, I abjure, I believe. Baptize me in the only faith.'"

"If it's as a compliment to the Count," I said, "it seems to me he ought to anticipate it by giving up, for you, something equally important."

She had spoken lightly and with a smile, and yet with an undertone of girlish ardour. The young man looked at her with a solemn, puzzled face, and shook his head. "Keep your religion," he said. "Every one his own. If you should attempt to embrace mine, I am afraid you would close your arms about a shadow. I am not a good Catholic, a good Christian! I don't understand all these chants and ceremonies and splendours. When I was a child I never could learn my catechism. My poor old confessor long ago gave me up; he told me I was a good boy, but a *pagan!* You must not be more devout than your husband. I don't understand your religion any better, but I beg you not to change it for mine. If it has helped to make you what you are, it must be good." And taking the young girl's hand, he was about to raise it affectionately to his lips; but suddenly

remembering that they were in a place unaccordant with profane passions, he lowered it with a comical smile. "Let us go," he murmured, passing his hand over his forehead. "This heavy atmosphere of St. Peter's always stupefies me."

They were married in the month of May, and we separated for the summer, the Contessa's mamma going to illuminate the domestic circle, beyond the sea, with her reflected dignity. When I returned to Rome in the autumn I found the young couple established at the Villa Valerio, which was now partly reclaimed from its antique decay. I begged that the hand of improvement might be lightly laid on it, for as an unscrupulous old painter of ruins and relics, with an eye to "subjects," I preferred that crumbling things should be allowed to crumble at their ease. My god-daughter was quite of my way of thinking; she had a high appreciation of antiquity. Advising with me, often, as to projected changes, she was sometimes more conservative even than I, and I more than once smiled at her archæological zeal, declaring that I believed she had married the Count because he was like a statue of the Decadence. I had a constant invitation to spend my days at the Villa, and my easel was always planted in one of the garden-walks. I grew to have a painter's passion for the place, and to be intimate with every tangled shrub and twisted tree, every moss-coated vase and mouldy sarcophagus and sad, disfeatured bust of those grim old Romans who could so ill afford to become more meagre-visaged. The place was of small extent; but

though there were many other villas more pretentious and splendid, none seemed to me more exquisitely romantic, more haunted by the ghosts of the past. There were memories in the fragrance of the untended flowers, in the hum of the insects. It contained, among other idle, untrimmed departments, an old ilex-walk, in which I used religiously to spend half-an-hour every day—half-an-hour being, I confess, just as long as I could stay without beginning to sneeze. The trees arched and intertwisted over the dusky vista in the most perfect symmetry; and as it was exposed uninterruptedly to the west, the low evening sun used to transfuse it with a sort of golden mist and play through it—over leaves and knotty boughs and mossy marbles—with a thousand crimson fingers. It was filled with disinterred fragments of sculpture—nameless statues and noseless heads and rough-hewn sarcophagi, which made it deliciously solemn. The statues used to stand in the perpetual twilight like conscious things, brooding on their long observations. I used to linger near them, half expecting they would speak and tell me their stony secrets—whisper hoarsely the whereabouts of their mouldering fellows, still unrecovered from the soil.

My god-daughter was idyllically happy and absolutely in love. I was obliged to confess that even rigid rules have their exceptions, and that now and then an Italian count is as genuine as possible. Marco was a perfect original (not a copy), and seemed quite content to be appreciated. Their life was a childlike interchange of caresses, as candid and natural as those of a shepherd and

shepherdess in a bucolic poem. To stroll in the ilex-walk and feel her husband's arm about her waist and his shoulder against her cheek; to roll cigarettes for him while he puffed them in the great marble-paved rotunda in the centre of the house; to fill his glass from an old rusty red amphora—these graceful occupations satisfied the young Countess.

She rode with him sometimes in the grassy shadow of aqueducts and tombs, and sometimes suffered him to show his beautiful wife at Roman dinners and balls. She played dominoes with him after dinner, and carried out, in a desultory way, a scheme of reading him the daily papers. This observance was subject to fluctuations caused by the Count's invincible tendency to go to sleep—a failing his wife never attempted to disguise or palliate. She would sit and brush the flies from him while he lay statuesquely snoring, and, if I ventured near him, would place her finger on her lips and whisper that she thought her husband was as handsome asleep as awake. I confess I often felt tempted to reply that he was at least quite as entertaining, for the young man's happiness had not multiplied the topics on which he readily conversed. He had plenty of good sense, and his opinion on any practical matter was usually worth having. He would often come and sit near me while I worked at my easel, and offer a friendly criticism on what I was doing. His taste was a little crude, but his eye was excellent, and his measurement of the correspondence between some feature of my sketch and the object I was trying to reproduce, as trustworthy as that of a mathe-

matical instrument. But he seemed to me to have either a strange reserve or a still stranger simplicity, to be fundamentally unfurnished with anything remotely resembling an idea. He had no beliefs nor hopes nor fears—nothing but senses, appetites, serenely luxurious tastes. As I watched him strolling about while he looked at his finger-nails, I often wondered whether he had anything that could properly be termed a soul, and whether good-health and good-nature were not the sum total of his advantages. "It's lucky he's good-natured," I used to say to myself; "for if he were not, there is nothing in his conscience to keep him in order. If he had irritable nerves instead of quiet ones, he would strangle us as the infant Hercules strangled the poor little snakes. He's the natural man! Happily, his nature is gentle; I can mix my colours at my ease." I wondered what he thought about and what passed through his mind in the sunny idleness that seemed to shut him in from the modern work-a-day world, of which, in spite of my passion for bedaubing old panels with ineffective portraiture of mouldy statues against screens of box, I still flattered myself I was a member. I went so far as to believe that he sometimes withdrew from the world altogether. He had moods in which his consciousness seemed so remote and his mind so irresponsive and inarticulate, that nothing but some fresh endearment or some sudden violence could have power to arouse him. Even his tenderness for his wife had a quality which made me uneasy. Whether or no he had a soul himself, he seemed not to suspect

that she had one. I took a god-fatherly interest in the development of her immortal part. I fondly believed her to be a creature susceptible of a moral life. But what was becoming of her moral life in this interminable heathenish honeymoon? Some fine day she would find herself tired of the Count's *beaux yeux* and make an appeal to his mind. She had, to my knowledge, plans of study, of charity, of worthily playing her part as a Contessa Valerio —a position as to which the family-records furnished the most inspiring examples. But if the Count found the newspapers soporific, I doubted whether he would turn Dante's pages very fast for his wife, or smile with much zest at the anecdotes of Vasari. How could he advise her, instruct her, sustain her? And if she should become a mother, how could he share her responsibilities? He doubtless would transmit his little son and heir a stout pair of arms and legs and a magnificent crop of curls, and sometimes remove his cigarette to kiss a dimpled spot; but I found it hard to picture him lending his voice to teach the lusty urchin his alphabet or his prayers, or the rudiments of infant virtue. One accomplishment indeed the Count possessed which would make him an agreeable playfellow: he carried in his pocket a collection of precious fragments of antique pavement—bits of porphyry and malachite and lapis and basalt—disinterred on his own soil and brilliantly polished by use. With these you might see him occupied by the half-hour, playing the simple game of catch-and-toss, ranging them in a circle, tossing them in rotation,

catching them on the back of his hand. His skill was remarkable; he would send a stone five feet into the air, and pitch and catch and transpose the rest before he received it again. I watched with affectionate jealousy for the signs of a dawning sense, on Martha's part, that she was the least bit oddly mated. Once or twice, as the weeks went by, I fancied I read them, and that she looked at me with eyes which seemed to remember certain old talks of mine in which I had declared—with such verity as you please—that a Frenchman, an Italian, a Spaniard, might be a very good fellow, but that he never really respected the woman he pretended to love. For the most part, however, my alarms, suspicions, prejudices, spent themselves easily in the charmed atmosphere of our romantic, our classical home. We were out of the modern world and had no business with modern scruples. The place was so bright, so still, so sacred to the silent, imperturbable past, that drowsy contentment seemed a natural law; and sometimes when, as I sat at my work, I saw my companions passing arm-in-arm across the end of one of the long-drawn vistas, and, turning back to my palette, found my colours dimmer for the radiant vision, I could easily have believed that I was some old monkish chronicler or copyist, engaged in illuminating a mediæval legend.

It was a help to ungrudging feelings that the Count, yielding to his wife's urgency, had undertaken a series of systematic excavations. To excavate is an expensive luxury, and neither Marco nor his later forefathers had possessed the means

for a disinterested pursuit of archæology. But his young wife had persuaded herself that the much-trodden soil of the Villa was as full of buried treasures as a bride-cake of plums, and that it would be a pretty compliment to the ancient house which had accepted her as mistress to devote a portion of her dowry to bringing its mouldy honours to the light. I think she was not without a fancy that this liberal process would help to disinfect her Yankee dollars of the impertinent odour of trade. She took learned advice on the subject, and was soon ready to swear to you, proceeding from irrefutable premises, that a colossal gilt-bronze Minerva, mentioned by Strabo, was placidly awaiting resurrection at a point twenty rods from the north-west angle of the house. She had a couple of asthmatic old antiquaries to lunch, whom, having plied with unwonted potations, she walked off their legs in the grounds; and though they agreed on nothing else in the world, they individually assured her that researches properly conducted would probably yield an unequalled harvest of discoveries. The Count had been not only indifferent but even unfriendly to the scheme, and had more than once arrested his wife's complacent allusions to it by an unaccustomed acerbity of tone. "Let them lie, the poor disinherited gods, the Minerva, the Apollo, the Ceres you are so sure of finding," he said, "and don't break their rest. What do you want of them? We can't worship them. Would you put them on pedestals to stare and mock at them? If you can't believe in them, don't disturb them.

Peace be with them!" I remember being a good deal impressed by a confession drawn from him by his wife's playfully declaring, in answer to some remonstrances in this strain, that he was really and truly superstitious. "Yes, by Bacchus, I *am* superstitious!" he cried. "Too much so, perhaps! But I'm an old Italian, and you must take me as you find me. There have been things seen and done here which leave strange influences behind! They don't touch you, doubtless, who come of another race. But me they touch often, in the whisper of the leaves and the odour of the mouldy soil and the blank eyes of the old statues. I can't bear to look the statues in the face. I seem to see other strange eyes in the empty sockets, and I hardly know what they say to me. I call the poor old statues ghosts. In conscience, we have enough on the place already, lurking and peering in every shady nook. Don't dig up any more, or I won't answer for my wits!"

This account of Marco's sensibilities was too fantastic not to seem to his wife almost a joke; and though I imagined there was more in it, he made a joke so seldom that I should have been sorry to convert the poor girl's smile into a suspicion. With her smile she carried her point, and in a few days arrived a kind of archæological expert, or commissioner, with a dozen workmen, who bristled with pickaxes and spades. For myself, I was secretly vexed at these energetic measures, for, though fond of disinterred statues, I disliked to see the soil disturbed, and deplored the profane sounds which were henceforth to jar upon the

sleepy stillness of the gardens. I especially objected to the personage who conducted the operations — a little ugly, dwarfish man, who seemed altogether a subterranean genius, an earthy gnome of the underworld, and went prying about the grounds with a malicious smile which suggested more delight in the money the Signor Conte was going to bury than in the expected marbles and bronzes. When the first sod had been turned the Count's mood seemed to change very much, and his curiosity got the better of his scruples. He sniffed delightedly the odour of the humid earth, and stood watching the workmen, as they struck constantly deeper, with a kindling wonder in his eyes. Whenever a pickaxe rang against a stone he would utter a sharp cry, and be deterred from jumping into the trench only by some assurance on the part of the little expert that it was a false alarm. The near prospect of discoveries seemed to act upon his nerves, and I met him more than once strolling restlessly among his cedarn alleys, as if at last he too had learned how to reflect. He took me by the arm and made me walk with him, having much to say about the chance of a "find." I rather wondered at his sudden eagerness, and asked myself whether he had an eye to the past or to the future—to the intrinsic interest of possible Minervas and Apollos, or to their market-value. Whenever the Count came down to the place and—as he very often did—began to berate his little army of spadesmen for dawdling, the diminutive person who superintended the operations would glance at me with a sarcastic twinkle which seemed

to hint that excavations were sometimes a snare. We were kept a good while in suspense, for several false beginnings were made—the earth probed in the wrong places. The Count was discouraged—the resumption of his naps testified to it. But the master-digger, who had his own ideas, shrewdly continued his labours; and as I sat at my easel I heard the spades making their gay sound as they touched the dislodged stones. Now and then I would pause, with an uncontrollable acceleration of my heart-beats. "It *may* be," I would say, "that some marble masterpiece is stirring there beneath its lightening weight of earth! There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught! What if I should be summoned to welcome another Antinous back to fame—a Venus, a Faun, an Augustus?"

One morning it seemed to me that I had been hearing for half-an-hour a livelier movement of voices than usual; but as I was preoccupied with a puzzling bit of work I made no inquiries. Suddenly a shadow fell across my canvas, and I turned round. The little excavator stood beside me, with a glittering eye, cap in hand, his forehead bathed in perspiration. Resting in the hollow of his arm was an earth-stained fragment of marble. In answer to my questioning glance he held it up to me, and I saw it was a woman's shapely hand. "Come!" he simply said, and led the way to the excavation. The workmen were so closely gathered round the open trench that I saw nothing till he made them divide. Then, full in the sun, and flashing it back, almost, in spite of her dusky

incrustations, I beheld, propped up with stones against a heap of earth, a majestic marble image. She seemed to me almost colossal, though I afterwards perceived that she was only of the proportions of a woman exceptionally tall. My pulses began to throb, for I felt that she was something great and it was a high privilege to be among the first to know her. Her finished beauty gave her an almost human look, and her absent eyes seemed to wonder back at us. She was amply draped, so that I saw that she was not a Venus. "She's a Juno," said the expert, decisively; and she seemed indeed an embodiment of celestial supremacy and repose. Her beautiful head, bound with a single band, could have bent only to give the nod of command; her eyes looked straight before her; her mouth was implacably grave; one hand, outstretched, appeared to have held a kind of imperial wand; the arm from which the other had been broken hung at her side with the most queenly majesty. The workmanship was of the greatest delicacy, and though perhaps there was more in her than usual of a certain personal expression, she was wrought, as a whole, in the large and simple manner of the great Greek period. She was a masterpiece of skill and a marvel of preservation. "Does the Count know?" I soon asked, for I had a guilty sense that our eyes were taking something from her.

"The Signor Conte is at his siesta," said the *padrone*, with his sceptical grin. "We don't like to disturb him."

"Here he comes!" cried one of the workmen,

and we promptly made way for him. His siesta had evidently been suddenly broken, for his face was flushed and his hair disordered.

"Ah, my dream—my dream was right, then!" he cried, and stood staring at the image.

"What was your dream?" I asked, as his face seemed to betray more dismay than delight.

"That they had found a wonderful Juno, and that she rose and came and laid her marble hand on mine. Is that it!" said the Count, excitedly.

An awestruck "Santissima Vergine!" burst from one of the listening workmen.

"Yes, Signor Conte, this is the hand!" said the superintendent, holding up his perfect fragment. "I have had it safe here this half-hour, so it can't have touched you!"

"But you are apparently right as to her being a Juno," I said. "Admire her at your leisure." And I turned away; for if the Count was superstitious I didn't wish to embarrass him by my observation. I repaired to the house to carry the news to my god-daughter, whom I found slumbering — dreamlessly, it appeared — over a great archæological octavo. "They have touched bottom," I said. "They have found something Phidian or Praxitelian, at the very least!" She dropped her octavo, and rang for a parasol. I described the statue, but not graphically, I presume, for Martha gave a little sarcastic grimace.

"A long, fluted peplum?" she said. "How very odd! I don't believe she's beautiful."

"She's beautiful enough to make you jealous, *figlioccia mia*," I replied.

We found the Count standing before the resurgent goddess in fixed contemplation, with folded arms. He seemed to have recovered from the impression of his dream, but I thought his face betrayed a still deeper emotion. He was pale, and gave no response as his wife affectionately clasped his arm. I am not sure, however, that his wife's attitude was not a livelier tribute to the perfection of the image. She had been laughing at my rhapsody as we walked from the house, and I had bethought myself of an assertion I had somewhere seen, that women lack the perception of the purest beauty. Martha, however, seemed slowly to measure our Juno's infinite stateliness. She gazed a long time, silently, leaning against her husband, and then stepped, half timidly, down upon the stones which formed a rough base for the figure. She laid her two rosy, ungloved hands upon the stony fingers of the goddess, and remained for some moments pressing them in her warm grasp and fixing her living eyes upon the sightless brow. When she turned round, her eyes were bright with the tear which deep admiration sometimes calls forth and which, in this case, her husband was too much absorbed to notice. He had apparently given orders that the workmen should be treated to a cask of wine, in honour of their discovery. It was now brought and opened on the spot, and the little expert, having drawn the first glass, stepped forward, hat in hand, and obsequiously presented it to the Countess. She only moistened her lips with it and passed it to her husband. He raised it mechanically to his

own ; then suddenly he stopped, held it a moment aloft, and poured it out slowly and solemnly at the feet of the Juno.

"Why, it's a libation!" I cried. He made no answer, and walked slowly away.

There was no more work done that day. The labourers lay on the grass, gazing with the native Roman relish of a fine piece of sculpture, but wasting no wine in pagan ceremonies. In the evening the Count paid the Juno another visit, and gave orders that on the morrow she should be transferred to the casino. The casino was a deserted garden-house, built in not ungraceful imitation of an Ionic temple, in which Marco's ancestors must often have assembled to drink cool syrups from Venetian glasses and listen to madrigals and other *concetti*. It contained several dusty fragments of antique sculpture, and it was spacious enough to enclose that richer collection of which I began fondly to regard the Juno as but the nucleus. Here, with short delay, this fine creature was placed, serenely upright, a reversed funereal *cippus* forming a sufficiently solid pedestal. The small superintendent, who seemed a thorough adept in all the offices of restoration, rubbed her and scraped her with mysterious art, removed her earthy stains, gave her back the lustre of her beauty. Her firm, fine surface seemed to glow with a kind of renascent purity and bloom, and but for her broken hand you might have fancied she had just received the last stroke of the chisel. Her presence remained no secret. Within two or three days half-a-dozen inquisitive *conoscenti* posted

out to obtain sight of her. I happened to be present when the first of these gentlemen (a German in blue spectacles, with a portfolio under his arm) presented himself at the Villa. The Count, hearing his voice at the door, came forward and eyed him coldly from head to foot.

"Your new Juno, Signor Conte," began the German, "is, in my opinion, much more likely to be a certain Proserpine——"

"I have neither a Juno nor a Proserpine to discuss with you," said the Count, curtly. "You are misinformed."

"You have dug up no statue?" cried the German. "What a scandalous hoax!"

"None worthy of your learned attention. I am sorry you should have the trouble of carrying your little note-book so far." The Count had suddenly become witty!

"But you have something, surely. The rumour is running through Rome."

"The rumour be damned!" cried the Count, savagely. "I have *nothing*—do you understand? Be so good as to say so to your friends!"

The answer was explicit, and the poor archæologist departed, tossing his flaxen mane. But I pitied him, and ventured to remonstrate with the Count. "She might as well be still in the earth, if no one is to see her," I said.

"*I* am to see her: that's enough!" he answered with the same unnatural harshness. Then, in a moment, as he caught me eyeing him askance, in troubled surprise, "I hated his great portfolio. He was going to make some hideous drawing of her."

"Ah, that touches me," I said. "I too have been planning to make a little sketch."

He was silent for some moments, after which he turned and grasped my arm, with less irritation, but with extraordinary gravity. "Go in there towards twilight," he said, "and sit for an hour and look at her. I think you will give up your sketch. If you don't, my good old friend—you are welcome!"

I followed his advice, and, as a friend, I gave up my sketch. But an artist is an artist, and I secretly longed to attempt one. Orders strictly in accordance with the Count's reply to our German friend were given to the servants, who, with an easy Italian conscience and a gracious Italian persuasiveness, assured all subsequent inquirers that they had been lamentably misinformed. I have no doubt, indeed, that, in default of larger opportunity, they made condolence remunerative. Further operations were, for the present, suspended, as implying an affront to the incomparable Juno. The workmen departed, but the little adept still haunted the premises and sounded the soil for his own entertainment. One day he came to me with his usual ambiguous grimace. "The beautiful hand of the Juno," he murmured; "what has become of it?"

"I have not seen it since you called me to look at her. I remember that when I went away it was lying on the grass, near the excavation."

"Where I placed it myself! After that it disappeared. *Pare impossibile!*"

"Do you suspect one of your workmen? Such

a fragment as that would bring more scudi than most of them ever looked at."

"Some, perhaps, are greater thieves than the others. But if I were to call up the greatest rascal of the lot and accuse him, the Count would interfere."

"He must value that beautiful hand, nevertheless."

My friend the resurrectionist looked about him and winked. "He values it so much that he himself purloined it. That's my belief, and I think that the less we say about it the better."

"Purloined it, my dear sir? After all, it's his own property."

"Not so much as that comes to! So beautiful a creature is more or less the property of every one; we have all a right to look at her. But the Count treats her as if she were a sacro-sanct image of the Madonna. He keeps her under lock and key, and pays her solitary visits. What does he do, after all? When a beautiful woman is in stone, all one can do is to look at her. And what does he do with that precious hand? He keeps it in a silver box; he has made a relic of it!" And this cynical personage began to chuckle grotesquely as he walked away.

He left me musing, uncomfortably, and wondering what the deuce he meant. The Count certainly chose to make a mystery of the Juno, but this seemed a natural incident of the first rapture of possession. I was willing to wait for permission to approach her, and in the meantime I was glad to find that there was a limit to his

constitutional apathy. But as the days elapsed I began to be conscious that his enjoyment was not communicative, but strangely cold and shy and sombre. That he should admire a marble goddess was no reason for his despising mankind; yet he really seemed to be making invidious comparisons between us. From this ridiculous proscription his charming wife was not excepted. At moments when I tried to persuade myself that he was neither worse nor better company than usual, the expression of her face contradicted this superficial view. She said nothing, but she wore a look of really touching perplexity. She sat at times with her eyes fixed on him with a kind of imploring curiosity, as if for the present she were too much surprised to be angry. What passed between them in private, I had, of course, no warrant to inquire. Nothing, I suspected—and that was the misery! It was part of the misery, too, that he was impenetrable to these mute glances, and looked over her head with an air of superb abstraction. Occasionally he seemed to notice that I too didn't know what to make of his condition, and then for a moment his dull eye would sparkle, half, as it appeared, with a kind of sinister irony, and half with an impulse strangely stifled, as soon as he felt it, to justify himself. But from his wife he kept his face inexorably averted; and when she approached him with some melancholy attempt at fondness he received it with an ill-concealed shudder. The situation struck me as tremendously queer, and I grew to hate the Count and everything that belonged to

him. "I was a thousand times right," I cried; "an Italian count may be mighty fine, but he won't *wear!* Give us some wholesome young fellow of our own blood, who will play us none of these dusky old-world tricks. Artist as I have aspired to be, I will never again recommend a husband with traditions!" I lost my pleasure in the Villa, in the violet shadows and amber lights, the mossy marbles and the long-trailing profile of the Alban Hills. My painting stood still; everything looked ugly. I sat and fumbled with my palette, and seemed to be mixing mud with my colours. My head was stuffed with dismal thoughts; an intolerable weight settled itself on my heart. The poor Count became, to my imagination, a dark efflorescence of the evil germs which history had implanted in his line. No wonder he was foredoomed to be cruel. Was not cruelty a tradition in his race, and crime an example? The unholy passions of his forefathers revived, incurably, in his untaught nature and clamoured dumbly for an issue. What a heavy heritage it seemed to me, as I reckoned it up in my melancholy musings, the Count's interminable ancestry! Back to the profligate revival of arts and vices—back to the bloody medley of mediæval wars—back through the long, fitfully glaring dusk of the early ages to its ponderous origin in the solid Roman state—back through all the darkness of history it stretched itself, losing every claim on my sympathies as it went. Such a record was in itself a curse, and my dear girl had expected it to sit as lightly and gratefully on

her consciousness as her feather on her hat! I have little idea how long this painful situation lasted. It seemed the longer from my god-daughter's persistent reticence and my inability to offer her a word of consolation. A sensitive woman, disappointed in marriage, exhausts her own ingenuity before she takes counsel of others. The Count's preoccupations, whatever they were, made him increasingly restless; he came and went at random, with nervous abruptness; he took long rides alone, and, as I inferred, rarely went through the form of excusing himself to his wife; and still, as time went on, he came no nearer explaining his mystery. With the lapse of the months, however, I confess that my anxiety began to be tempered with compassion. If I had expected to see him propitiate his inexorable ancestry by the commission of a misdeed, now that his honest nature appeared to have refused them this satisfaction, I felt a sort of grudging gratitude. A man couldn't be so infernally blue without being, however little he might confess it, in want of sympathy. He had always treated me with that antique deference to a grizzled beard for which elderly men reserve the cream of their general tenderness for waning fashions, and I thought it possible he would suffer me at last to lay a healing hand upon his trouble. One evening, when I had taken leave of my god-daughter and given her, in a silent kiss, my rather ineffectual blessing, I came out and found the Count sitting in the garden in the mild starlight, and staring at a mouldy Hermes, planted in a clump of oleander.

I sat down by him and informed him in definite terms that his conduct required an explanation. He half turned his head, and his dark pupil gleamed an instant.

"I understand," he said; "you think me crazy!" And he tapped his forehead.

"No, not crazy, but unhappy. And if unhappiness runs its course too freely, of course, it's a great strain upon the mind."

He was silent awhile, and then—"I am not unhappy!" he cried, abruptly. "I am tremendously happy. You wouldn't believe the satisfaction I take in sitting here and staring at that old weather-worn Hermes. Formerly I used to be afraid of him; his frown used to remind me of a bushy-browed old priest who taught me Latin and looked at me terribly over the book when I stumbled in my Virgil. But now it seems to me the friendliest, jolliest thing in the world, and suggests the most delightful images. He stood pouting his great lips in some old Roman's garden two thousand years ago. He saw the sandalled feet treading the alleys, and the rose-crowned heads bending over the wine; he knew the old feasts and the old worship, the old believers and the old gods. As I sit here he speaks to me, in his own dumb way, and describes it all! No, no, my friend, I am the happiest of men!"

I had denied that I thought he was crazy, but I suddenly began to suspect it, for I found nothing reassuring in this singular rhapsody. The Hermes, for a wonder, had kept his nose; and when I reflected that my dear Countess was

being neglected for this senseless pagan block, I secretly promised myself to come the next day with a hammer and deal him such a lusty blow as would make him too ridiculous for a sentimental *tête-à-tête*. Meanwhile, however, the Count's infatuation was no laughing matter, and I expressed my sincerest conviction when I said, after a pause, that I should recommend him to see either a priest or a physician.

He burst into uproarious laughter. "A priest! What should I do with a priest, or he with me? I never loved them, and I feel less like beginning than ever. A priest, my dear friend," he repeated, laying his hand on my arm, "don't set a priest at me, if you value *his* sanity! My confession would frighten the poor man out of his wits. As for a doctor, I never was better in my life; and unless," he added abruptly, rising and eyeing me askance, "you want to poison me, in Christian charity I advise you to leave me alone."

Decidedly, the Count *was* unsound, and I had no heart, for some days, to go back to the Villa. How should I treat him, what stand should I take, what course did Martha's happiness and dignity demand? I wandered about Rome, turning over these questions, and one afternoon found myself in the Pantheon. A light spring shower had begun to fall, and I hurried for refuge into the big rotunda which its Christian altars have but half converted into a church. No Roman monument retains a deeper impress of ancient life, or has more of the form of the antique faiths whose temples were nobler than their gods.

The huge dusky dome seems to the spiritual ear to hold a vague reverberation of pagan worship, as a shell picked up on the beach holds the rumour of the sea. Three or four persons were scattered before the various altars; another stood near the centre, beneath the aperture in the dome. As I drew near I perceived this was the Count. He was planted with his hands behind him, looking up first at the heavy rain-clouds, as they crossed the great bull's-eye, and then down at the besprinkled circle on the pavement. In those days the pavement was rugged and cracked and magnificently old, and this ample space, in free communion with the weather, had become as mouldy and mossy and verdant as a strip of garden-soil. A tender herbage had sprung up in the crevices of the slabs, and the little microscopic shoots were twinkling in the rain. This great weather-current, through the uncapped vault, deadens effectively the customary odours of incense and tallow, and transports one to a faith that was on terms of reciprocity with nature. It seemed to have performed this office for the Count; his face wore an indefinable expression of ecstasy, and he was so rapt in contemplation that it was some time before he noticed me. The sun was struggling through the clouds without, and yet a thin rain continued to fall, and came drifting down into our gloomy enclosure in a sort of illuminated drizzle. The Count watched it with the fascinated stare of a child watching a fountain, and then turned away, pressing his hand to his brow, and walked over to one of the rather

perfunctory altars. Here he again stood staring, but in a moment wheeled about and returned to his former place. Just then he recognised me, and perceived, I suppose, the curious gaze I must have fixed on him. He waved me a greeting with his hand, and at last came towards me. He was in a state of nervous exaltation—doing his best to appear natural.

"This is the best place in Rome," he murmured. "It is worth fifty St. Peters'. But do you know I never came here till the other day? I left it to the *forestieri*. They go about with their red books and their opera-glasses, and read about this and that, and think they know it. Ah! you must *feel* it—feel the beauty and fitness of that great open skylight. Now, only the wind and the rain, the sun and the cold, come down; but of old—of old"—and he touched my arm and gave me a strange smile—"the pagan gods and goddesses used to descend through it and take their places at their altars. What a procession, when the eyes of faith could see it! Those are the things they have given us instead!" And he gave a pitiful shrug. "I should like to pull down their pictures, overturn their candlesticks, and poison their holy-water!"

"My dear Count," I said gently, "you should tolerate people's honest beliefs. Would you renew the Inquisition, and in the interest of Jupiter and Mercury?"

"People wouldn't tolerate *my* belief, if they guessed it!" he cried. "There's been a great talk about the pagan persecutions; but the Christians

persecuted as well, and the old gods were worshipped in caves and woods as well as the new. And none the worse for that! It was in caves and woods and streams, in earth and air and water, they dwelt. And there—and here, too, in spite of all your Christian lustrations—a son of old Italy may find them still!"

He had said more than he meant, and his mask had fallen. I looked at him hard, and felt a sudden outgush of the compassion we always feel for a creature irresponsibly excited. I seemed to touch the source of his trouble, and my relief was great, for my discovery made me feel like bursting into laughter. But I contented myself with smiling benignantly. He looked back at me suspiciously, as if to judge how far he had betrayed himself; and in his glance I read, somehow, that he had a conscience we could take hold of. In my gratitude I was ready to thank any gods he pleased. "Take care, take care," I said, "you are saying things which if the sacristan there were to hear and report——!" And I passed my hand through his arm and led him away.

I was startled and shocked, but I was also amused and comforted. The Count had suddenly become for me a delightfully curious phenomenon, and I passed the rest of the day in meditating on the strange ineffaceability of race-characteristics. A sturdy young Latin I had called poor Marco, and he was sturdier, indeed, than I had dreamed him! Discretion was now out of place, and on the morrow I spoke to my god-daughter. She had lately been hoping, I think, that I would help

her to unburden her heart, for she immediately gave way to tears and confessed that she was miserable. "At first," she said, "I thought it was all fancy, and not his affection that was growing less but my exactions that were growing greater. But suddenly it settled upon me like a mortal chill—the conviction that he had ceased to care for me, that something had come between us. And the puzzling thing has been the want of possible cause in my own conduct, or of any sign that there is another woman in the case. I have racked my brain to discover what I had said, or done, or thought, to displease him! And yet he goes about like a man too deeply injured to complain. He has never uttered a harsh word or given me a reproachful look. He has simply renounced me. I have dropped out of his life."

She spoke with such a pathetic little quiver in her voice that I was on the point of telling her that I had guessed the riddle, and that this was half the battle. But I was afraid of her incredulity. My solution was so fantastic, so apparently far-fetched, so absurd, that I resolved to wait for convincing evidence. To obtain it I continued to watch the Count, covertly and cautiously, but with a vigilance which disinterested curiosity now made intensely keen. I returned to my painting, and neglected no pretext for hovering about the gardens and the neighbourhood of the casino. The Count, I think, suspected my designs, or at least my suspicions, and would have been glad to remember just what he had suffered himself to say to me in the Pantheon. But it deepened my interest in

his extraordinary situation that, in so far as I could read his deeply brooding face, he seemed—half contemptuously—to have forgiven me. He gave me a glance occasionally, as he passed me, in which a kind of dumb desire for help appeared to struggle with the conviction that such a one as I would never even understand him. I was willing enough to help him, but the case was exceedingly delicate, and I wished to master the symptoms. Meanwhile, I worked and waited and wondered. Ah! I wondered, you may be sure, with an interminable wonder, and, turn it over as I would, I couldn't get used to my idea. Sometimes it offered itself to me with a perverse fascination which deprived me of all wish to interfere. The Count took the form of a precious psychological study, and refined feeling seemed to dictate a tender respect for his delusion. I envied him the force of his imagination, and I used sometimes to close my eyes with a vague desire that when I opened them I might find Apollo under the opposite tree, lazily kissing his flute, or see Diana hurrying with long steps down the ilex-walk. But for the most part my host seemed to me simply an unhappy young man, with a morbid mental twist which ought to be smoothed away as speedily as possible. If the remedy was to match the disease, however, it would have to be an extraordinary dose!

One evening, having bidden my god-daughter good-night, I started on my usual walk to my lodgings in the Corso. Five minutes after leaving the villa-gate I discovered that I had left my eye-

glass—an object in constant use—behind me. I immediately remembered that, while painting, I had broken the string which fastened it round my neck, and had hooked it provisionally upon the twig of a flowering-almond which happened to be near me. Shortly afterwards I had gathered up my things and retired, unmindful of the glass; and now, as I needed it to read the evening paper at the Caffè Greco, there was no alternative but to retrace my steps and detach it from its twig. I easily found it, and lingered awhile to note the curious night-aspect of the spot I had been studying by daylight. The night was magnificent, and full-charged with the breath of the early Roman spring. The moon was rising fast and flinging her silver checkers into the heavy masses of shadow. Watching her at play, I strolled further and suddenly came in sight of the casino.

Just then the moon, which for a moment had been concealed, touched with a white ray a small marble figure which adorned the pediment of this rather factitious little structure. The way it leaped into prominence suggested that a rarer spectacle was at hand, and that the same influence must be vastly becoming to the imprisoned Juno. The door of the casino was, as usual, locked, but the moonlight flooded the high-placed windows so generously that my curiosity became obstinate and inventive. I dragged a garden-seat round from the portico, placed it on end, and succeeded in climbing to the top of it and bringing myself abreast of one of the windows. The casement yielded to my pressure, turned on its hinges, and

showed me what I had been looking for—a transfiguration. The beautiful image stood bathed in the cold radiance, shining with a purity that made her convincingly divine. If by day her rich paleness suggested faded gold, she now had a complexion like silver slightly dimmed. The effect was almost terrible; beauty so expressive could hardly be inanimate. This was my foremost observation—I leave you to fancy whether my next was less interesting. At some distance from the foot of the statue, just out of the light, I perceived a figure lying flat on the pavement, prostrate apparently with devotion. I can hardly tell you how it completed the impressiveness of the scene. It marked the shining image as a goddess indeed, and seemed to throw a sort of conscious pride into her stony mask. Of course, in this recumbent worshipper I immediately recognised the Count, and while I lingered there, as if to help me to read the full meaning of his attitude, the moonlight travelled forward and covered his breast and face. Then I saw that his eyes were closed, and that he was either asleep or swooning. Watching him attentively, I perceived his even respirations, and judged there was no reason for alarm. The moonlight blanched his face, which seemed already pale with weariness. He had come into the presence of the Juno in obedience to that fabulous passion of which the symptoms had given us so much to wonder at, and, exhausted either by compliance or resistance, he had sunk down at her feet in a stupid sleep. The lunar influence soon roused him, however; he muttered some-

thing and raised himself, vaguely staring. Then, recognising his situation, he rose and stood for some time gazing fixedly at the brilliant image, with an expression which I suspected was not that of wholly unprotesting devotion. He uttered a string of broken words, of which I was unable to catch the meaning, and then, after another pause and a long, melancholy moan, he turned slowly to the door. As rapidly and noiselessly as possible I descended from my post of vigilance and passed behind the casino, and in a moment I heard the sound of the closing lock and of his departing footsteps.

The next day, meeting in the garden the functionary who had conducted the excavation, I shook my finger at him with an intention of portentous gravity. But he only grinned like the malicious earth-gnome to which I had always compared him, and twisted his moustache as if my menace were a capital joke. "If you dig any more holes here," I said, "you shall be thrust into the deepest of them, and have the earth packed down on top of you. We have made enough discoveries, and we want no more statues. Your Juno has almost ruined us."

He burst out laughing. "I expected as much —I had my notion!"

"What was your notion?"

"That the Signor Conte would begin and say his prayers to her."

"Good heavens! Is the case so common? Why did you expect it?"

"On the contrary, the case is rare. But I have fumbled so long in the monstrous heritage

of antiquity that I have learned a multitude of secrets—learned that ancient relics may work modern miracles. There is a pagan element in all of us—I don't speak for you, *illustrissimi forestieri*—and the old gods have still their worshippers. The old spirit still throbs here and there, and the Signor Conte has his share of it. He's a good fellow, but, between ourselves, he's an impossible Christian!" And this singular personage resumed his impertinent hilarity.

"If your previsions were so distinct, you ought to have given me a hint of them," I said. "I should have sent your spadesmen walking."

"Ah, but the Juno is so beautiful!"

"Her beauty be blasted! Can you tell me what has become of the Contessa's? To rival the Juno she is turning to marble herself."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, but the Juno is worth fifty thousand scudi!"

"I would give a hundred thousand to have her annihilated! Perhaps, after all, I shall want you to dig another hole."

"At your service!" he answered, with a flourish, while I turned my back upon him.

A couple of days later I dined, as I often did, with my host and hostess, and met the Count face to face for the first time since his prostration in the casino. He bore the traces of it, and was uncommonly taciturn and absent. It appeared to me that the path of the antique faith was not strewn with flowers, and that the Juno was becoming daily a harder mistress to serve. Dinner was scarcely over before he rose from table and

took up his hat. As he did so, passing near his wife, he faltered a moment, stopped and gave her—for the first time I imagine—that vaguely imploring look which I myself had often caught. She moved her lips in inarticulate sympathy and put out her hands. He drew her towards him, kissed her with an almost brutal violence, and strode away. The occasion was propitious, and further delay unnecessary.

"What I have to tell you is very strange," I said to the Countess, "very improbable, very incredible. But perhaps you will not find it so bad as you feared. There *is* a woman in the case! Your enemy is the Juno. The Count—how shall I say it?—the Count takes her *au sérieux*." She was silent; but after a moment she touched my arm with her hand, and I knew she meant that I had spoken her own belief. "You admired his antique simplicity: you see how far it goes! He has reverted to the faith of his fathers. Dormant for so many centuries, that imperious image has silently evoked it. He believes in the pedigrees you used to dog's-ear your school-mythology with trying to get by heart. In a word, dear child, Marco is an anthropomorphist. Do you know what that means?"

"I suppose you will be terribly shocked," she answered, "if I say that he is welcome to any faith, if he will only share it with me. I will believe in Jupiter, if he'll bid me! My sorrow is not for that: let my husband be himself! My sorrow is for the gulf of silence and indifference that has opened itself between us. His Juno is the reality; I am the fiction!"

"I have lately become reconciled to this gulf of silence, and to your losing for a while your importance. After the fable the moral! The poor fellow has but half succumbed; the other half protests. The modern man is shut out in the darkness with his irreproachable wife. How can he have failed to feel—vaguely and grossly, if it must have been, but in every throb of his heart—that you are a more perfect experiment of nature, a riper fruit of time, than those primitive persons for whom Juno was a terror and Venus a model? He pays you the compliment of believing you an unconvertible modern. He has crossed the Acheron, but he has left you behind, as a pledge to the present. We will bring him back to redeem it. The old ancestral ghosts ought to be propitiated when a pretty creature like you has sacrificed the best elements of her life. He has proved himself one of the Valerii; we shall see to it that he is the last, and yet that his passing away shall leave the Conte Marco in excellent health."

I spoke with confidence, and partly felt it, for it seemed to me that if the Count was to be touched it must be by the sense that his strange spiritual excursion had not made his wife detest him. We talked long and to a hopeful end, for before I went away my god-daughter expressed the desire to go out and look at the Juno. "I was afraid of her almost from the first," she said, "and have hardly seen her since she was set up in the casino. Perhaps I can learn a lesson from her—perhaps I can guess how she charms him!"

For a moment I hesitated, from the fear that

we might intrude upon the Count's devotions. Then, as something in the poor girl's face suggested that she too had thought of this and felt a sudden impulse to pluck victory from the heart of danger, I bravely offered her my arm. The night was cloudy, and on this occasion, apparently, the triumphant goddess was to depend upon her own lustre. But as we approached the casino I saw that the door was ajar and that there was lamplight within. The lamp was suspended in front of the image, and it showed us that the place was empty. But evidently the Count had lately been there. Before the statue stood a roughly extemporised altar, composed of a shapeless fragment of antique marble, engraved with an illegible Greek inscription. We seemed really to stand in a pagan temple, and as we gazed at the serene divinity I think we each of us felt for a moment the breath of superstition. It ought to have been quickened, I suppose, but it was rudely arrested, by our observing a curious glitter on the face of the low altar. A second glance showed us it was blood!

My companion looked at me in pale horror, and turned away with a cry. A swarm of hideous conjectures pressed into my mind, and for a moment I was sickened. But at last I remembered that there is blood and blood, and that in the best time the ancient Romans offered no human victims.

"Be sure it's very innocent," I said; "a lamb, a kid, or a sucking calf!" But it was enough for her nerves and her conscience that it was a

crimson trickle, and she returned to the house in immense agitation. The rest of the night was not passed in a way to restore her to calmness. The Count had not come in, and she sat up for him from hour to hour. I remained with her—smoking my cigar as composedly as I might; but internally I wondered what in horror's name had become of him. Gradually, as the hours wore away, I arrived at a vague interpretation of these strange practices—an interpretation none the less valid and less welcome for being comparatively cheerful. The blood-drops on the altar, I mused, were the last instalment of his debt and the end of his delusion. They had been a happy necessity, for he was after all too generous a creature not to hate himself for having shed them, not to abhor so cruelly insistent an idol. He had wandered away to recover himself in solitude, and he would come back to us with a repentant heart and an inquiring mind! I should certainly have believed all this more easily, however, if I could have heard his footstep in the hall. Toward dawn scepticism threatened to creep in with the gray light, and I restlessly betook myself to the portico. Here in a few moments I saw him cross the grass, heavy-footed, splashed with mud, and evidently excessively tired. He must have been walking all night, and his face denoted that his spirit had been as restless as his body. He passed near me, and before he entered the house he stopped, looked at me a moment, and then held out his hand. I grasped it warmly, and it seemed to me to throb with all that he was unable to utter.

"Will you see your wife?" I asked.

He passed his hand over his eyes and shook his head. "Not now—not yet—some time!" he answered.

I was disappointed, but I convinced her, I think, that he had cast out the devil. She felt, poor girl, a pardonable desire to celebrate the event. I returned to my lodging, spent the day in Rome, and came back to the Villa toward dusk. I was told that the Countess was in the grounds. I looked for her cautiously at first, for I thought it just possible I might intrude upon the natural consequences of a reconciliation; but, failing to meet her, I turned toward the casino, and found myself face to face with the mocking little commissioner.

"Does your excellency happen to have twenty yards of stout rope about him?" he asked, gravely.

"Do you want to hang yourself for the trouble you have stood sponsor to?" I answered.

"It's a hanging matter, I promise you. The Countess has given orders. You will find her in the casino. Sweet-voiced as she is, she knows how to make her orders understood."

At the door of the casino stood half-a-dozen of the labourers on the place, looking vaguely solemn, like outstanding dependants at a superior funeral. The Countess was within, in a position which was an answer to the surveyor's riddle. She stood with her eyes fixed on the Juno, who had been removed from her pedestal and lay stretched in her magnificent length upon a rude litter.

"Do you understand?" she said. "She's beauti-

ful, she's noble, she's precious, but she must go back!" And, with a passionate gesture, she seemed to represent an open grave.

I was hugely delighted, but I thought it discreet to stroke my chin and look scrupulous. "She is worth fifty thousand scudi."

She shook her head sadly. "If we were to sell her to the Pope and give the money to the poor, it wouldn't profit us. She must go back—she must go back! We must smother her beauty in the dreadful earth. It makes me feel almost as if she were alive; but it came to me last night with overwhelming force, when my husband came in and refused to see me, that he will not be himself so long as she is above ground. To cut the knot we must bury her! If I had only thought of it before!"

"Not before!" I said, shaking my head in turn. "Heaven reward our sacrifice now!"

The little expert, when he reappeared, seemed hardly like an agent of the celestial influences, but he was deft and active, which was more to the point. Every now and then he uttered some half-articulate lament, by way of protest against the Countess's cruelty; but I saw him privately scanning the recumbent image with an eye which seemed to foresee a malicious glee in standing on a certain unmarked spot on the turf and grinning till people stared. He had brought back an abundance of rope, and, having summoned his assistants, who vigorously lifted the litter, he led the way to the original excavation, which had been left unclosed, owing to the project of further

researches. By the time we reached the edge of the grave the evening had fallen and the beauty of our marble victim was shrouded in a dusky veil. No one spoke—if not exactly for shame, at least for regret. Whatever our plea, our performance looked, at least, monstrously profane. The ropes were adjusted and the Juno was slowly lowered into her earthy bed. The Countess took a handful of earth and dropped it solemnly on her breast. "May it lie lightly, but for ever!" she said.

"Amen!" cried the little surveyor, with a strange, sneering inflection; and he gave us a bow, as he departed, which betrayed an agreeable consciousness of knowing where fifty thousand scudi were buried. His underlings had another cask of wine, the result of which, for them, was a suspension of all consciousness, and a subsequent irreparable confusion of memory as to where they had plied their spades.

The Countess had not yet seen her husband, who had again apparently betaken himself to communion with the great god Pan. I was of course unwilling to leave her to encounter alone the results of her momentous deed. She wandered into the drawing-room and pretended to occupy herself with a bit of embroidery, but in reality she was bravely composing herself for an "explanation." I took up a book, but it held my attention as feebly. As the evening wore away I heard a movement on the threshold, and saw the Count lifting the tapestried curtain which masked the door and looking silently at his wife. His eyes were brilliant, but not angry. He had missed the

Juno—and drawn a long breath! The Countess kept her eyes fixed on her work, and drew her silken threads like an image of domestic tranquillity. The image seemed to fascinate him; he came in slowly, almost on tiptoe, walked to the chimney-piece, and stood there awhile, giving her, askance, an immense deal of attention. What had passed, what was passing, in his mind, I leave to your own apprehension. My god-daughter's hand trembled as it rose and fell, and the colour came into her cheek. At last she raised her eyes and sustained the gaze in which all his returning faith seemed concentrated. He hesitated a moment, as if her very forgiveness kept the gulf open between them, and then he strode forward, fell on his two knees, and buried his head in her lap. I departed as the Count had come in, on tiptoe.

He never became, if you will, a thoroughly modern man; but one day, years after, when a visitor to whom he was showing his cabinet became inquisitive as to a marble hand, suspended in one of its inner recesses, he looked grave and turned the lock on it. "It is the hand of a beautiful creature," he said, "whom I once greatly admired."

"Ah—a Roman?" asked the gentleman, with a smirk.

"A Greek," said the Count, with a frown.

1874.

MASTER EUSTACE.

I.

HAVING handed me my cup of tea, she proceeded to make her own—an operation she performed with an old-maidish precision I delighted to observe.

The story is not my own (she then began), but that of persons with whom for a time I was intimately connected. I have led a very quiet life; this is my only romance—and it's the romance of others. When I was a young woman of twenty-two my poor mother died, after a long, weary illness, and I found myself obliged to seek a new home. Making a home requires time and money. I had neither to spare, so I advertised for a "situation," rating my accomplishments modestly, and asking rather for kind treatment than high wages. Mrs. Garnyer immediately answered my advertisement. She offered me a fair salary and a peaceful asylum. I was to teach her little boy the rudiments of my slender stock of science and to make myself generally useful. Something in her tone and manner assured me that in accepting this latter condition I was pledging myself to no very onerous servitude, and I never found reason to repent of my bargain. I

had always valued my freedom before all things, and it seemed to me that in trading it away even partially I was surrendering a priceless treasure; but Mrs. Garnyer made bondage very easy. I liked her from the first, and I doubt if she ever fully appreciated my fidelity and affection. She knew she could trust me, and she always spoke of me as "a good creature;" but she never measured the trouble I saved her, or the little burdens I lifted from her pretty, feeble shoulders. Both in her position and her person there was something singularly appealing. She was in those days—indeed she always remained—a very attractive woman; but she had grace even more than beauty. She was young, and looked even younger than her years; slight, fluttering, with frequent gestures and not many words, and fairer, whiter, purer in complexion than any woman I have seen. She reminded me of a sketch from which the "shading" has been omitted. She had her shadows indeed, as well as her lights; but they were all turned inward. She might have been made up of the airy substance of lights and shadows. Nature in putting her together had left out the harder, heavier parts, the selfishness, the ambition, the power to insist and to calculate. Experience, however, had given her a burden to carry; she was evidently sorrow-laden. She shifted the cruel weight from shoulder to shoulder, she ached and sighed under it, and in the depths of her sweet natural smile you saw it pressing the tears from her very soul. Mrs. Garnyer's distresses, I confess, were in my eyes an added charm. I was desperately fond of a bit of romance, and as

I was plainly never to have one of my own, I made the most of my neighbour's. This secret sadness would have covered more sins than I ever had to forgive her. At first, naturally, I connected it with the death of her husband ; but, as time went on, I found reason to believe that there had been little love between the pair. She had been married against her will ; Mr. Garnyer was fifteen years her senior, and, as she frankly mentioned, coarsely and cruelly dissipated. Their married life had lasted but three years, and had come to an end to her great and manifest relief. Had he done her while it lasted some irreparable wrong? I suspected so ; she was like a garden-rose with half its petals plucked. He had left her with diminished means, though her property (mostly her own) was still ample for her needs. These, with those of her son, were extremely simple. To certain little luxuries she was obstinately attached ; but her manner of life was so monotonous and frugal that she must have spent but a fraction of her income. It was her single son—the heir of her hopes, the apple of her eye—that she entrusted to my care. He was five years old, and she had taught him his letters—a great feat she seemed to think ; she was as proud of it as if she had invented the alphabet for the occasion. She had called him Eustace, for she meant that he should have the best of everything—the prettiest clothes, the prettiest playthings and the prettiest name. He was himself as pretty as his name, though not at all in the manner of his mother. He was slight like her, but far more nervous and decided, and he had

neither her features nor her colouring. Least of all had he her expression. Mrs. Garnyer's attitude was one of tender, pensive sufferance modified by hopes—a certain half-mystical hope which seemed akin to religion, but which was not all religion, for the heaven she dreamed of was situated here below. The boy from his early childhood presented himself as a little man who would take a line of his own. He was not one who would ever wait for things, good or evil; he would snatch boldly at the one sort and snap his fingers at the other. He had a pale, dark skin, not altogether healthy in tone; a mass of fine brown hair, which seemed given him just to emphasise by its dancing sweep the petulant little nods and shakes of his head; and a deep, wilful, malicious eye. His eye told me from the first that I should have no easy work with him, and with every possible relaxation of the nursery-code my place never became in the least a sinecure. His wits were so quick, however, and his imagination so lively, that I gradually managed to fill out his mother's meagre little programme of study. This had been drawn up with a sparing hand; her only fear was of his being overworked. The poor lady had but a dim conception of what a man of the world is expected to know. She thought, I believe, that with his handsome face, his handsome property, and his doting mother, he would need to know little more than how to sign that pretty name of Eustace to replies to invitations to dinner. I wonder now that with her constant interference I contrived to set the child intellectually on his legs. Later, when he had a

tutor, I received a compliment for my perseverance.

The truth is, I became fond of him; his very imperfections fascinated me. He would soon enough have to take his chance of the world's tolerance, and society would cease to consist for him of a couple of coaxing women. I told Mrs. Garnyer that there was never an easier child to spoil, and that those fondling hands of hers would sow a crop of formidable problems for future years. But Mrs. Garnyer was utterly incapable of taking a rational view of matters, or of sacrificing to-day to to-morrow; and her folly was the more incurable as it was founded on a strange, perverse little principle—a crude, passionate theory—that love, love, pure love, is the sum and substance of maternal duty, and that the love which reasons and requires and refuses is cruel and wicked. "I know you think I am a silly goose," she said, "and not fit to have a child at all. But you are wrong—I promise you you are wrong. I am very reasonable, I am very patient; I have a great deal to bear—more than you know—and I bear it very well. But one can't be always on the stretch—always hard and wise and good. In some things one must break down and be one's poor natural, lonely self. Eustace can't turn out wrong; it's impossible; it would be too cruel. You must not say it nor hint it. I shall do with him what my heart bids me; he is all I have; he consoles me."

My notions perhaps were a little old-fashioned; but surely it will never altogether go out of fashion to teach a child that he is not to have the moon by

crying for it. Now Eustace had a particular fancy for the moon, for everything bright, inaccessible and absurd. His will was as sharp as a steel spring, and it was vain to attempt to bend it or break it. He had an indefeasible conviction that he was number one among men; and if he had been born in the purple, as they say, of some far-off Eastern court, or found himself the final morbid little offshoot of a long line of despots, he couldn't have had a greater idea of his prerogative. The poor child had no sense of justice—he had the extra virtues, but not the regular ones. He could condescend, he could forgive, he could allow things, if his leave had been asked, but he couldn't endure the hint of a conflicting right. He could love, love passionately; but he was so jealous and exacting that his love cost you very much more than it was worth. If he liked me and confided in me, I had worked hard for it—I had to "live up" to it. He thought it a very great honour that he should care to harness me up as his horse, to throw me his ball by the hour, to make me joggle with him on the see-saw (sitting close to the middle), till my poor bones ached. Nevertheless, in this frank, childish arrogance there was an almost irresistible charm, and I was absurdly flattered at his liking me. Poor me! at twenty-three I was his first "conquest"—the first in a long list, as I believe it came to be. If he required a great margin, he used it with a peculiar grace of his own, and he admitted the corresponding obligation of being clever and brilliant. As a child even, he had a kind of personal distinction. His talents

were excellent, and teaching him, whatever it may have been, was at least not dull work. It was indeed less to things really needful than to the luxuries of learning that he took most kindly. He had an excellent ear for music, and though he never practised properly he turned off an air with wonderful expression. In this he resembled his mother, who was a natural musician. She, however, was always at the piano, and whenever I think of her in those early years I see her sitting before it musingly, half sadly, with her pretty head on one side, her fair braids thrust behind her ears —ears from which a couple of small but admirable diamonds were never absent—and her white hands wandering over the notes, seeking vaguely for a melody they seemed hardly to dare to remember. Eustace had an unsatiable appetite for stories, though he was one of the coolest and most merciless of critics. I can imagine him now at my knee, with his big eyes fastened on my lips, demanding more wonders and more, till my short-winded invention had to cry for breath. Do my best, I could never startle him ; my giants were never big enough and my fairies never small enough, my enchanters, dragons, dungeons and castles never on the really grand scale of his own imaginative needs. I felt dreadfully below the mark. At last he would open his wilful little mouth and yawn in my face, with a dreadfully dry want of conviction. I felt flattered when by chance I had pleased him, for, by a precocious instinct, he knew tinsel from gold. "Look here," he would say, "you are remarkably ugly ; what

makes you so ugly? Your nose is so big at the end." (You needn't protest; I *was* ugly. Like most very plain women, I have improved with time.) Of course I used to rebuke him for his rudeness; though I was secretly thankful, because it taught me a number of things. Once he said something, I forget what, that made me burst into tears. It was the first time, and the last; for I found that, instead of exciting his pity, tears only moved his contempt, and apparently a kind of cynical, physical disgust. The best way was to turn the tables on him by pretending to be indifferent and superior. In that case he himself would condescend to tears—bitter, wrathful tears. Then you had perhaps gained nothing, but you had lost nothing. In every other case you *had* lost.

II.

Of course these close relations lasted but a couple of years. I had made him very much wiser than myself; he was growing tall and boyish and terribly inquisitive. My poor little stories ceased to have any illusion for him, and he would spend hours lying on his face on the carpet, kicking up his neat little legs and poring over the *Arabian Nights*, the *Fairy Queen*, the other prime enchanters of childhood. My advice would have been to pack him off to school; but I might as well have asked his mother to send him to the penitentiary. He was to be educated *en prince;* he was to have an instructor to himself. I thought sympathetically of the worthy pedagogue who was

to minister to Eustace without competition. But such a one was easily found—in fact, he was found three times over. Three private tutors came and went successively. They fell in love, punctually, with Mrs. Garnyer. Their love indeed she might have put up with; but unhappily, unlike Viola, they "told" it—by letter—with an offer of their respective hands. Their letters were different, but to Mrs. Garnyer their hands were all alike, all very untidy paws. "The horrid creatures!" was her invariable commentary. "I wouldn't speak to them for the world. My dear, you must do it." And I, who had never declined an offer on my own account, went to work in this wholesale manner for my friend! You will say that, young as she was—pretty, independent, lonely—Mrs. Garnyer would have looked none the worse for a spice of coquetry. But she never would have forgiven herself a flirtation. Her greatest charm for me was her scorn for this sort of levity, and indeed her general contempt for cheap sentimental effects. It was as if, from having drunk at the crystal head-spring, she had lost her taste for standing water. She was absolutely indifferent to attention; it inspired her, in fact, with a kind of terror. She had not a trace of personal vanity; she was even without visible desire to please. Unfortunately, as you see, she pleased in spite of herself. As regards love, she had an imposing array of principles; on this one point she was always very explicit. "It's either a passion," she said, "or it's nothing. You can know it by being willing to give up everything for it—name and

fame, past and future, this world and the next. Do you keep back a feather's weight of tenderness or trust? Then you are not in love. You must risk everything, for you get everything—if you are happy. I can't understand a woman trifling with such feelings. They talk about the unpardonable sin; that's it, it seems to me. Do you know the word in the language I most detest?—*Flirtation.* Poh! it makes me ill." When Mrs. Garnyer uttered this hint of an esoteric doctrine, her clear blue eyes would become clouded with the gathered mists of memory. In this matter she understood herself and meant what she said.

Impatient as she was of being "made up to," she exposed herself very little to such dangers, and almost never went into the world. She met her few friends but two or three times a year, and was without a single intimate. As time went on she came to care more for me than for any one. When Eustace had outgrown my teaching she insisted on my remaining in any capacity I chose —as housekeeper, companion, seamstress, guest; I might make my own terms. I became a little of each of these, and with the increasing freedom of our intercourse grew to regard her as a younger and weaker sister. I gave her, for what it was worth, my best judgment on all things. Her own confidence always stopped short of a certain point; a little curtain of reticence was always suspended between us. Sometimes it appeared to grow thinner and thinner, becoming almost transparent and revealing the figures behind it. Sometimes it seemed to move and flutter in the

murmur of our talk, as if in a moment it might drop away or melt away into air. But it was a magical web; it played a hundred tormenting tricks, and year after year it hung in its place. Of course I had fits of immense curiosity, but I can't say more for the disinterested affection I felt for Mrs. Garnyer than that I never pried, never pressed her. I lingered near the door of her Blue-Beard's chamber, but I never peeped through the keyhole. She was a poor lady with a secret; I took her into my heart, secret and all. She insisted that her isolation was her own choice, and pretended to be exceedingly glad that society let her so well alone. She made her widowhood serve as a motive for her monotonous years, and declared that her boy's education amply filled them. She was a widow, however, who never of her own accord mentioned her husband's name, and she wore her weeds very lightly. She was very fond of white, and for six months of the year was rarely seen in a dark dress. Occasionally, on certain fixed days, she would flame forth in some old-fashioned piece of finery from a store which she religiously preserved, and would flash about the house in rose-colour or blue. One day—her boy's birthday—she kept with extraordinary solemnity. It fell in the middle of September. On this occasion she would put on a faded ball-dress, overload herself with jewels and trinkets, dress her hair with flowers. Eustace, too, she would trick out in a suit of crimson velvet, and in this singular guise the pair would walk with prodigious gravity about the garden and up and

down the avenue. Every now and then she would stoop and give him a convulsive hug. The child himself seemed to feel the magnitude of this festival, and played his part with precocious effect. He would appear at dusk with the curl still in his hair, his velvet trousers unstained, his ruffles uncrumpled. In the evening the coachman let off rockets in the garden; we feasted on ice-cream and a bottle of champagne was sent to the kitchen. No wonder Master Eustace carried himself like an heir-apparent! Once, I remember, the mother and son were overtaken in their festal promenade by some people who had come to live in the neighbourhood, and who drove up, rather officiously, to leave their cards. They stared, in amazement, from the carriage-window, and were told Mrs. Garnyer was not at home. A few days later we heard that Mrs. Garnyer was out of her mind; she had been found masquerading in her grounds with her little boy, in the most indecent costume. From time to time she received an invitation, and occasionally she accepted one. When she went out she made her mourning more marked, and she always came home in a fret. "It is the last house I will go to," she used to say, as I helped her to undress. "People's neglect I can bear, and thank them for it; but heaven deliver me from their kindness! I won't be patronised—I won't, I won't! Shall I, my boy? We will wait till you grow up, shan't we, my darling? Then his poor little mother shan't be patronised, shall she, my brave little man?" The child was constantly dangling at his mother's skirts, and was

seldom beyond the reach of some such passionate appeal.

A preceptor had at last been found of a less inflammable composition than the others—a worthy, elderly German of fair attainments, with a stout, sentimental wife—she gave music-lessons in town—who monopolised his ardour. He was a mild, patient man: a nose of wax, as the saying is—a pretty nose it grew to be in Eustace's supple fingers! I will answer for it that in all those years he never carried a single point. I believe that, like me, he had begun with tears; but finding this an altogether losing game, he was content now to take off his spectacles, drop his head on one side, look imploringly at his pupil with his weak blue eyes, and then exhale his renunciation in a plaintive *Lieber Gott!* Under this discipline the boy bloomed like a flower; but it was to my sense a kind of hot-house growth. His tastes were sedentary, and he lived most of the time within doors. He kept a horse, and took long lonely rides; but there were whole days that he spent lounging over a book, trifling at the piano, or fretting over a water-colour sketch which he was sure to throw aside in disgust. One amusement he pursued with unwearying constancy; it was a sign of especial good-humour, and I never knew it to fail him. He would sit for hours lounging in a chair, with his head thrown back and his legs extended, staring at vacancy, or what seemed to us so: but a vacancy filled with the silent revel of his imagination and the scenes it presented to him. What was the substance of these ecstatic visions? The

broad, happy life on which he would enter some day, the great world whose far-off murmur caressed his ear—the joys of prosperous manhood—pleasure, success, popularity—a kind of triumphant and transfigured egotism. His reveries swarmed with tinted pictures and transcendent delights; his handsome young face, his idle insolent smile, wore the cold reflection of their brightness. His mother, after watching him for a while in these moods, would steal up behind him and kiss him softly on the forehead, as if to marry his sweet illusions to sweeter reality. For my part, I wanted to divorce them. It was a sad pity, I thought, that desire and occasion, in the lad's life, played so promptly into each other's hands. I longed to spoil the game, to shuffle the cards afresh and give him a taste of bad luck. I felt as if between them—she by her measureless concessions, he by his consuming arrogance—they were sowing a crop of dragon's teeth. This sultry summer of youth couldn't last for ever, and I knew that the poor lady would be the first to suffer by a change of weather. He would turn some day, in his passionate vanity, and rend the gentle creature who had fed it with the delusive wine of her love. And yet he had a better angel as well as a worse, and it was a marvel to see how this superior spirit (a sort of human conscience) tussled with the fiend and, in spite of bruises and ruffled pinions, returned again and again to the onset. There were days when his generous, boyish gaiety—the natural sunshine of youth and cleverness—warmed our women's hearts and

kindled our most trusting smiles. Me, as he grew older, he treated as a licensed old-time friend. I was the prince's jester—I used to tell him his truths, as the French say. He believed them just enough to feel an agreeable irritation in listening; for the rest, doubtless, they seemed as vague and remote as the croaking of the frogs in the pond. There were moments, I think, when the eternal blue sky of his mother's temper wearied his capricious brain. At such times he would come and sprawl on the sofa near my little work-table, clipping my threads, mixing my reels, mislaying my various utensils, and criticising my work without reserve—chattering, gossiping, complaining, boasting. With all his faults Eustace had one sovereign merit—that merit without which even the virtues he lacked lose half their charm: he was magnificently candid. He was only too transparent. The light of truth played through his interlaced pretensions, and against it they stood relieved in their hard tenacity, like fine young trees against a sunrise. He expressed his passions—expressed them only too loudly; you received ample notice of his revenges. They came as a matter of course; he never took them out in talk; but you were warned.

III.

If these intense meditations of which I have spoken followed exclusively the train of his personal fortunes, his conversation was hardly more disinterested. It was altogether about him-

self—his ambitions, his ailments, his dreams, his opinions, his intentions. He talked a great deal of his property, and though he had a great aversion to figures he knew the amount of his expectations before he was out of jackets. He had a keen relish for luxury, and, indeed, as he respected pretty things and used them with a degree of tenderness which he by no means lavished upon animate objects, saving, sparing, and preserving them, this seemed to me one of his most human traits, though, I admit, an expensive virtue—and he promised to spend his fortune in books and pictures, in art and travel. His mother was frequently called upon to do the honours of his castles in the air. She would look at him always with her doting smile, and with a little glow of melancholy in her eyes—a faint tribute to some shadowy chance that even her Eustace might reckon without his host. She would shake her head tenderly, or lean it on his shoulder and murmur, "Who knows, who knows? It's perhaps as foolish, my son, to try and anticipate our happiness as to attempt to take the measure of our misery. We know them each when they come. Whatever comes to us, at all events, we shall meet it together." Resting in this delicious contact, with her arm round his neck and her cheek on his hair, she would close her eyes in a sort of mild ecstasy. As I have never had a son myself I can speak of maternity but by hearsay; but I feel as if I knew some of its secrets, as if I had gained from Mrs. Garnyer a revelation of maternal passion. The perfect

humility of her devotion, indeed, seemed to me to point to some motive deeper than common motherhood. It looked like a kind of penance, a kind of pledge. Had she done him some early wrong? Did she meditate some wrong to come? Did she wish to purchase pardon for the past or impunity for the future? One might have supposed from the lad's calm relish of her incense—as if it were the fumes of some perfumed chibouque palpitating lazily through his own lips—that he had a gratified sense of something to forgive. In fact, he had something to forgive us all—our dulness, our vulgarity, our not guessing his unuttered desires, the want of a pre-established harmony between our wills and his. It seemed to me, however, that there were even moments when he turned dizzy on the edge of this awful gulf of his mother's self-sacrifice. Fixing his eyes, then, an instant, to steady himself, he took comfort in the thought that she had ceased to suffer—her personal ambitions lay dead at the bottom. He could vaguely see them—distant, dim, motionless. It was to be hoped that no adventurous ghost of those shuffled-off passions would climb upward to the light.

A frequent source of complaint, with Eustace, when he had no more handy dissatisfaction, was that he had not known his father. He had formed a mental image of the late Mr. Garnyer which I am afraid hardly tallied at all points with the original. The boy knew that he had been a man of pleasure, and he had painted his portrait in ideal hues. What a charming father—a man of

pleasure, Eustace thought, as if he had believed that gentlemen of this stamp take their pleasure in the nursery. What pleasures they might have shared; what rides, what talks, what games, what adventures—what far other hours than those he passed in the deserted billiard-room (this had been one of Mr. Garnyer's most marked tastes), clicking the idle balls in the stillness. He learned to talk very early of arranging his life to resemble his father's. What he had done his son would do. A dozen odds and ends which had belonged to Mr. Garnyer he carried to his room, where he paraded them on his mantel-shelf like relics on a high altar. When he was seventeen years old he began to smoke an old silver-mounted pipe which had his father's initials embossed on the bowl. "It would be a great blessing," he said, as he puffed this pipe—it made him dismally sick, for he hated tobacco—"to have some man in the house. It's so fearfully womanish here. No one but you two and Hauff, and what's he but an old woman? Mother, why have you always lived in this way? What's the matter with you? You have no *savoir vivre.* What are you blushing about? That comes of moping here all your days —that you blush for nothing. I don't want my mother to blush for anything or any one, not even for me. But I give you notice, I can stand it no longer. Now I'm seventeen it's time I should see the world. I am going to travel. My father travelled; he went all over Europe. There's a little French book upstairs, the poems of Parny—it's awfully French, too—with 'Henry Garnyer,

Paris, 1802,' on the fly-leaf. I must go to Paris; I shan't go to college. I have never been to school. I want to be complete—privately educated altogether. Very few Americans are; it's quite a distinction. Besides, I know all I want to know. Hauff brought me out some college-catalogues. They're absurd; he laughs at them. We did all that three years ago. I know more about books than most young fellows; what I want is knowledge of the world. My father had it, and you haven't, mother. But he had plenty of taste, too. Hauff says that little edition of Parny is very rare. I shall bring home lots of such things. *Vous allez voir!*" Mrs. Garnyer listened to such effusions of filial emulation in sad, embarrassed silence. I couldn't but pity her. She knew that her husband was no proper model for her child; yet she couldn't in decency turn his heart against his father's memory. She took refuge in that tremulous reserve which committed her neither to condemnation of her husband nor to approval with her son.

She had recourse at this period, as I had known her to do before, to a friend attached to a mercantile house in India—an old friend, she had told me; "in fact," she had added, "my only friend—a man to whom I am under immense obligations." Once in six months there came to her from this distant benefactor a large square letter, heavily sealed and covered with foreign post-marks. I used to believe it to be a kind of bulletin of advice for the coming half-year. Advice about what? Her cares were so few, her habits so simple, that

they offered scanty matter for discussion. But now, of course, came a packet of good counsel in regard to these plans of Eustace's. I knew that she dreaded it; but, since her oracle had spoken, she put on a brave face. She was certainly a very faithful believer. She concealed from Eustace the extent of her dependence on this far-away monitor, for the boy would have resented such interference, even though it should fall in with his own projects. She had always read her friend's letters in secret; this was the only practice of her life she failed to share with her son. Me she now for the first time admitted into her confidence. "Mr. Cope strongly recommends my letting him go," she said. "He says it will make a man of him. He needs to rub against other men. I suppose, at least," she cried, with her usual sweet fatuity, "it will do other men no harm! Perhaps I don't love him as I ought, and I must lose him awhile to learn to prize him. If I only get him back again! It would be monstrous that I shouldn't! But why are we cursed with these perpetual scruples and fears? It's a weary life!" She would have said more if she had known that it was not his departure but his return that was to be cruel.

The excellent Mr. Hauff was too limp and battered to be a bear-leader in distant lands; but a companion was secured in the person of his nephew, an amiable young German, who was represented to know the world as well as he knew books. For a week before he left us Eustace was so friendly and good-humoured that we cried for him in advance. "I give her into your care," he

said to me. "If anything happens to her I shall hold you responsible. She is very woe-begone just now, but she will cheer up as soon as I am out of sight. But, mother, you are not to be too cheerful, mind. You are not to forget me an instant. If you do I will never forgive you. I insist on being missed. There's little enough merit in loving me when I am here; I wish to be loved in my absence." For many weeks after he left he might have been satisfied. His mother wandered about like a churchyard-ghost keeping watch near a buried treasure. When his letters began to come she read them over a dozen times, and sat for hours, with her eyes closed, holding them in her hand. They were wretchedly meagre and hurried, but their very brevity gratified her. He was prosperous and happy, and could snatch but odd moments from the recreations of his age.

One morning, after he had been away some three months, there came two letters, one from Eustace, the other from India, the latter very much in advance of its time. Mrs. Garnyer opened the Indian letter first. I was pouring out tea; I observed her from behind the urn. As her eyes ran over the pages she turned deadly pale; then, raising her glance, she met mine. Immediately her paleness turned to crimson. She rose to her feet and hurried out of the room, leaving Eustace's letter untouched on the table. This little fact was eloquent, and my curiosity was excited. Later in the day it was partially satisfied. She came to me with a singular, conscious look—the look of a sort of oppression of happiness

—and announced that Mr. Cope was coming home. He had obtained release from his engagements in India, and would arrive in a fortnight. She uttered no words of rejoicing, and I could see that her joy was of the unutterable sort. As the days elapsed, however, her emotion betrayed itself in a restless, aimless flutter of movement, so violent as to be painful to behold. She roamed about the house, singing to herself, gazing out of the windows, shifting the chairs and tables, smoothing the curtains, trying vaguely to brighten the faded look of things. Before every mirror she paused and inspected herself, with that frank audacity of pretty women which I have always envied, tucking up a curl of her fair hair or smoothing a crease in those muslins which she always kept so fresh. Of Eustace for the moment she rarely spoke; the boy's prediction had not been so very much amiss. Who was this wonderful Mr. Cope, this mighty magician?

I very soon learned. He arrived on the day he had fixed, and took up his residence in the house. From the moment I looked at him I felt that he was a man I should like. I suppose I was flattered by the notice he took of so humble a personage. He had often heard of me, he said; he knew how good a friend I had been to Mrs. Garnyer; he hoped very much I would be indulgent to him. I felt as if I were amply repaid for my years of domestic service. But, in spite of this pleasant assurance, I had a sense of being for the moment altogether *de trop*. He was united to his friend by a closer bond than I had suspected. I left

them alone with their old memories and references, and confined myself to my own room; though indeed I had noticed between them a sort of sentimental intelligence in which words might pass without audible speech. Mrs. Garnyer underwent a singular change; I seemed to know her now for the first time. It was as if she had flung aside a veil which muffled her tones and blurred her features. There was a new decision in her tread, a deeper meaning in her smile; so, at thirty-eight her girlhood had come back to her! She was as full of blushes and random prattle and foolish falterings for very pleasure as a young bride. Upon Mr. Cope the years had set a more ineffaceable seal. He was a man of forty-five, but you might easily have given him ten years more. He had that look which I have always liked, of people who have lived in hot climates: a bronzed complexion and a cool, deliberate gait, as if he had learned to think twice before moving. He was tall and lean, yet very powerful, like a large man somewhat "reduced." His hair was thin and perfectly white, and he wore a grizzled moustache. He dressed in loose, light-coloured garments of those fine Eastern stuffs. I had a singular impression of having seen him before, but I could never say when or where. He was extremely deaf—so deaf that I had to force my voice; though I observed that Mrs. Garnyer easily made him hear by speaking slowly and looking at him. He had, peculiarly, that patient, appealing air which you find in very deaf persons less frequently than in the blind, but which is more touching when the

eye is alive and sees what the ear loses. He had been obliged to make good company of himself, and the glimpses that one got of this resigned fellowship in stillness were of a kind to make one long to enter into it. But with others, too, he was a charming talker, though he was obliged to keep the talk in his own hands. He took your response for granted with a kind of conciliating brightness, guessed your opinion with a glance, and phrased it usually better than you would have done.

IV.

FOR ten years I had been pitying Mrs. Garnyer; it was odd now to find myself envying her. Patient waiting is no loss, and at last her day had come. I had always rather wondered at her patience; but, after all, it was spiced with private reasons. She had lived by precept and example, by chapter and verse; for *his* sake it was easy to be wise. I say for "his" sake, because, as a matter of course, I now connected her visitor with that element of mystery which had been one of my earliest impressions of Mrs. Garnyer. Mr. Cope's presence renewed my memory of it. I fitted the key to the lock, but on coming to open the casket I was disappointed to find that the principal part of the secret had evaporated. I made up my mind that Mr. Cope had been her first and only love. Her parents had frowned on him and forced her into a marriage with poor dissolute Mr. Garnyer—a course the more revolting

as he had already spent half his own property and was likely to make sad havoc with his wife's. He had a high social value, which the girl's own family, who were plain enough people to have had certain primitive scruples in larger measure, deemed a compensation for his vices. The discarded lover, thinking she had not resisted as firmly as she might, embarked for India, and there, half in spite, half in despair, married as sadly amiss as herself. He had trifled with his happiness; he lived to repent. His wife lived, as well, to perpetuate his misery; it was my belief that she had only recently died, and that this event was the occasion of his return. When he arrived he wore a weed on his hat; the next day it had disappeared. Reunion had come to the pair in the afternoon of life, when the tricks and graces of passion are no longer becoming; but when these have spent themselves something of passion still is left, and this my companions were free to enjoy. They had begun to enjoy it with the chastened eagerness of which I caught the aroma. Such was my reading of the riddle. Right or not, at least it made sense.

I had promised Eustace to write to him, and one afternoon as I sat alone, well pleased to have a theme, I despatched him a long letter, full of the praises of Mr. Cope, and, by implication, of his mother's improved condition. I wished to anticipate his possible suspicions and reconcile him with the altered situation. But after I had posted my letter it seemed to me that I had been too precipitate. I doubted whether, even amid the larger

life of the grand tour, he had unlearned the old trick of jealousy. Jealousy surely would have been quite misplaced, for Mr. Cope's affection for his hostess embraced the boy, embraced everything that concerned her. He regretted the lad's absence; he manifested the kindliest interest in everything that spoke of him; he turned over his books, he looked at his sketches, he examined and compared the half-dozen portraits which the fond mother had caused to be executed at various stages of his growth. One sultry day, when poor Mr. Hauff travelled out from town for news of his pupil, he made a point of being introduced and of shaking his hand. The tutor stayed to dinner, and on Mr. Cope's proposition we drank the boy's health in brimming glasses. The old German of course wept profusely; it was Eustace's mission to make people cry. I thought too I saw a tear on Mr. Cope's lid. The cup of his contentment was full; at a touch it overflowed. On the whole, however, he took this bliss of reunion more quietly than his friend. He was a melancholy man. He had the air of one for whom the moral of this fable of life has greater charms than the plot, and who has made up his mind to ask no favours of destiny. When he met me he used to smile gently, frankly, saying little; but I had a great liking for his smile. It seemed to say much—to murmur, "Receive my compliments. You and I are a couple of tested souls; we understand each other. We are not in a flutter with the privilege of existence, like charity-children on a picnic. We have had, each of us, to live for years without the thing we once fancied

gave life its only value. We have tasted of servitude; and patience, taken up as a means, has grown grateful as an end. It has cured us of eagerness." So wisely it gossiped, the smile of our guest. No wonder I liked it.

One evening, a month after his advent, Mrs. Garnyer came to me with a strange, embarrassed air. "I have something to tell you," she said; "something that will surprise you. Do you consider me a *very* old woman? I am old enough to be wiser, you will say. But I have never been so wise as to-day. I am engaged to be married to Mr. Cope. There! make the best of it. I have no apologies to make to any one," she went on, almost defiantly. "It's between ourselves. If we suit each other, it's no one's business. I know what I am about. He means to remain in this country; we should be constantly together and extremely intimate. As he says, I am young enough to be—what do they call it?—compromised. Of course, therefore, I am young enough to marry. It will make no difference with you; you will stay with me all the same. Who cares, after all, what I do? No one but Eustace, and he will thank me for giving him such a father. Ah, I shall do well by my boy!" she cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "I shall do better than he knows. My property, it appears, is dreadfully entangled. Mr. Garnyer did as he pleased with it; I was given to him with my hands tied. Mr. Cope has been looking into it, and he tells me that it will be a long affair to put things to rights. I have been living all these years at the mercy of unprincipled

agents. But now I have given up everything to Mr. Cope. *He* will drive the money-changers from the temple! It's a small reward to marry him. Eustace has no head for money-matters; he only knows how to spend. For years now he needn't think of them—Mr. Cope is our providence. Don't be afraid; Eustace won't object, and at last he will have a companion—the best, the wisest, the kindest. You know how he used to long for one—how tired he was of me and you. It will be a new life. Oh, I'm a happy mother—at last—at last! Don't look at me so hard; I am a blushing bride, remember. Smile, laugh, kiss me. There! You are a good creature. I shall make my boy a present—the handsomest that ever was made. Poor Mr. Cope—I am happier than he! I have had my boy all these years, and he has had none. He has the heart of a father—he has longed for a son. Do you know," she added, with a strange smile, "that I think he marries me as much for my son's sake as for my own? He marries me at all events—boy and all!" This speech was uttered with a forced and hurried animation which betrayed the effort to cheat herself into pure enthusiasm. The matter was not quite so simple as she tried to believe. Nevertheless, I was exceedingly pleased, and I kissed her in genuine sympathy. The more I thought of it the better I liked the marriage. It relieved me personally of a burdensome sense of ineffectual care, and it filled out solidly a kind of defenceless breach which had always existed on the worldly face of Mrs. Garnyer's position. Moreover, it promised to be full of advantages for

Eustace. It was a pity indeed that Eustace had but a slender relish for things that were good for him. I venture to hope, however, that his worship of his father's memory had been, at bottom, the expression of a need for some higher authority and of a capacity to be respectful when there was something really to respect. Yet I took the liberty of suggesting to Mrs. Garnyer that she perhaps counted too implicitly on her son's concurrence; that he was always in opposition; that a margin should be left for his possible perversity. Of course I was called a suspicious wretch for my pains.

"For what do you take him?" she cried. "I shall just put them face to face. Eustace has delicacy. A word to the wise, says the proverb. I know what I am about."

She knew it, I think, hardly so well as she declared. I had deemed it my duty to make a modest little speech of congratulation to the bridegroom elect. He blushed—somewhat to my surprise—but he answered me with a few proper, grateful words. He was much preoccupied; Mrs. Garnyer was of a dozen different minds about her wedding-day. I had taken for granted that they would wait for Eustace's return; but I was somewhat startled on learning that Mr. Cope disapproved of further delay. They had waited twenty years! Mrs. Garnyer told me that she had not announced the news to Eustace—she wished it to be a "surprise." She seemed, however, not altogether to believe in her surprise. Poor lady! she had made herself a restless couch. One evening, coming into the library, I found Mr. Cope pleading his cause.

For the first time I saw him excited, and he turned appealingly to me. "You have great influence with this lady," he said. "Argue my case. Are we people to care for Mrs. Grundy? Has she been so very civil to us? We don't marry to please her; I don't see why she should arrange the wedding. Mrs. Garnyer has no trousseau to buy, no cards to send. Indeed, I think any more airs and graces are rather ridiculous. They don't belong to our years. There's little Master Grundy, I know," he went on, smiling—"a highly honourable youth! But I will take charge of him. I should like immensely, of course, to have him at the wedding; but one of these days I shall make up for the breach of ceremony by punctually attending his own." It was only an hour before this, as it happened, that I had received Eustace's answer to my letter. It was brief and hasty, but he had found time to insert some such words as this: "I don't at all thank you for your news of Mr. Cope. I knew that my mother only wanted a chance to forget me and console herself, as they say in France. Demonstrative mothers always do. I am like Hamlet—I don't approve of mothers consoling themselves. Mr. Cope may be an excellent fellow —I have no doubt he is; but I do hope he will have finished his visit by the time I get back. The house isn't large enough for both of us. You will find me a bigger man than when I left home, I give you warning. I have got a bristling black moustache, and I am proportionately fiercer." I said nothing about this letter, and a week later my companions were married. The time will always

be memorable to me, apart from this matter of my story, from the intense and overwhelming heat which then prevailed. It had lasted several days when the nuptials took place; it bade fair to last all summer. The ceremony was performed by the little old Episcopal clergyman whose ministrations Mrs. Garnyer had regularly attended, and who had always given her a vague parochial countenance. His sister, a mature spinster who wore her hair cut short and called herself "strong-minded," and, thus qualified, had made overtures to Mrs. Garnyer —this lady and myself were the only witnesses. The marriage had nothing of a festive air; it seemed a solemn sacrifice to the unknown god. Mrs. Garnyer was very much oppressed by the heat; in the vestibule, on leaving the church, she fainted. They had arranged to go for a week to the sea-side, to a place they had known of old. When she had revived we placed her in the carriage, and they immediately started. I, of course, remained in charge of the empty house, greatly envying them their cooling breezes.

V.

On the morning after the wedding, sitting alone in the darkened library, I heard a rapid tread in the hall. My first thought, of course, was of burglars—my second of Eustace. In a moment he came striding into the room. His step, his glance, his whole outline, foretold trouble. He was extraordinarily changed, and all for the better. He seemed taller, older, manlier. He was bronzed

by travel and dressed with great splendour. The moustache he had mentioned, though but a slender thing as yet, gave him, to my eye, a formidable foreign look. He gave me no greeting.

"Where's my mother?" he cried.

My heart rose to my throat; his tone seemed to put us horribly in the wrong. "She's away—for a day," I said. "But you"—and I took his hand—"pray where have you dropped from?"

"From New York, from shipboard, from Southampton. Is this the way my mother receives me?"

"Why, she never dreamed you were coming."

"She got no letter? I wrote from New York."

"Your letter never came. She left town yesterday, for a week."

He looked at me hard. "How comes it you are not with her?"

"I am not needed. She has—she has——" But I faltered.

"Say it—say it!" he cried; and he stamped his foot. "She has a companion."

"Mr. Cope went with her," I said, in a still small voice. I was ashamed of my trepidation, I was outraged by his imperious manner, but the thought of worse to come unnerved me.

"Mr. Cope—ah!" he answered, with an indefinable accent. He looked about the room as if he wanted to pick out some offensive trace of Mr. Cope's passage. Then flinging himself into a chair, "What infernal heat!" he went on. "What a horrible climate you have got here! Do bring me a glass of water."

I brought him his glass, and stood before him as he quickly drank it. "Don't think you are not welcome if I ask what has brought you home so suddenly," I ventured to say.

He gave me another hard look over the top of his glass. "A suspicion. It's none too soon. Tell me what is going on between my mother and Mr. Cope."

"Eustace," I said, "before I answer you, let me remind you of the respect which, under all circumstances, you owe your mother."

He sprang from his chair. "Respect! I am right then—they mean to marry! Speak!" And as I hesitated, "You needn't speak," he cried. "I see it in your face. Thank God, I'm here!"

His violence roused me. "If you have a will to enforce in the matter, you are indeed none too soon. You are too late—your mother is married." I spoke passionately, but in a moment I repented of my words.

"*Married!*" the poor boy shouted. "MARRIED, you say!" He turned deadly pale, and stood staring at me with his mouth wide open. Then, trembling in all his limbs, he dropped into a chair. For some moments he was silent, gazing at me with a kind of fierce stupefaction, overwhelmed by the treachery of fate. "Married," he went on. "When, where, how? Without me—without notice—without shame! And you stood and watched it, as you stand and tell me now! I called you friend!" he cried, with the bitterest reproach. "But if my mother betrays me, what can I expect of *you?* Married!" he repeated.

"Is the devil in it? I'll unmarry her! When—when—when?" And he seized me by the arm.

"Yesterday, Eustace. I entreat you to be calm."

"Calm? Is it a case for calmness? *She* was calm enough—that she couldn't wait for her son!" He flung aside the hand I had laid upon his to sooth him, and began a furious march about the room. "What has come to her? Is she mad? Has she lost her head, her heart, her memory—all that made her mine? You are joking—come, it's a horrible dream!" And he stopped before me, glaring through fiery tears. "Did she hope to keep it a secret? Did she hope to hide away her husband in a cupboard? Her husband! And I—I—I—what has she done with me? Where am I in this devil's game? Standing here crying like a schoolboy for a cut finger—for the bitterest of disappointments! She has blighted my life—she has blasted my rights. She has insulted me—dishonoured me. Am I a man to treat in that fashion? Am I a man to be made light of? Brought up as a flower and trampled as a weed! Wrapped in cotton and then exposed—you needn't speak"—I had tried, for pity, to remonstrate—"you can say nothing that is not idiotic. There's nothing to be said but this—that I'm *insulted.* Do you understand?" He uttered the word with a concentrated rancour of vanity. "I guessed it from the first. I knew it was coming. Mr. Cope—Mr. Cope—always Mr. Cope! It poisoned my journey—it poisoned my pleasure—it poisoned Italy. You don't know what

that means. But what matter, so long as it has poisoned my home? I held my tongue—I swallowed my rage; I was patient, I was gentle, I forbore. And for this! I could have damned him with a word! At the seaside, hey? Enjoying the breezes—splashing in the surf—picking up shells. It's idyllic, it's ideal: great heavens, it's fabulous, it's monstrous! It's well she's not here. I don't answer for myself. Yes, you goose, stare, stare—wring your hands! You see an angry man, an outraged man, but a man, mind you! He means to act as one."

This sweeping torrent of unreason I had vainly endeavoured to arrest. He pushed me aside, strode out of the room, and went bounding upstairs to his own chamber, where I heard him close the door with a terrible bang and turn the key. My hope was that his passion would expend itself in this first explosion; I was glad to bear the brunt of it. But I regarded it as my duty to communicate with his mother. I wrote her a hurried line: "Eustace is back—very ill. Come home." This I entrusted to the coachman, with injunctions to carry it in person to the place where she was staying. I believed that if she should start as soon as she received it she might reach home late at night. Those were the days of private conveyances. Meanwhile I did my best to pacify the poor young man. There was something almost insane in his resentment; he seemed absolutely rabid. This was the sweet compliance, the fond assent, on which his mother had counted; this was the "surprise"! I went repeatedly to

the door of his room with soft speeches and urgent prayers and offers of luncheon, of wine, of vague womanly comfort. But there came no answer but shouts and imprecations, and finally a sullen silence. Late in the day I heard him, from the window, order the gardener to saddle his horse; and in a short time he came stamping down stairs, booted and spurred, pale, dishevelled, with blood-shot eyes. "Where are you going," I said, "in this awful heat?"

"To ride—ride—ride myself cool!" he cried. "There's nothing so hot as my rage!" And in a moment he was in the saddle and bounding out of the gate. I went up to his room. Its wild disorder told me how he had raved up and down. A dozen things were strewn, broken, on the floor; old letters were lying crumpled and torn; I was sickened by the sight of a pearl necklace, snatched from his gaping valise, and evidently purchased as a present to his mother, ground into fragments on the carpet, as if by his boot-heels. His father's relics were standing in a row, untouched, on the mantel-shelf, save for a couple of pistols, mounted with his initials, in silver, which were tossed upon the table. I made a courageous effort to thrust them into a drawer and turn the key, but to my eternal regret I was afraid to touch them. Evening descended and wore away; but neither Eustace nor his mother returned. I sat gloomily enough on the verandah, listening for wheels or hoofs. Towards midnight a carriage rattled over the gravel; my friend descended, with her husband, at the door. She fluttered into my arms with a

kind of shrinking eagerness. "Where is he—how is he?" she cried.

I was spared the pain of answering, for at the same moment I heard Eustace's horse clatter into the stable-yard. He had rapidly dismounted, and he passed into the house by one of the lateral windows, which opened from the piazza into the drawing-room. There the lamps were lighted; I led in my companions. Eustace had crossed the threshold of the window; the lamplight fell upon him, relieving him against the darkness. His mother, with a shriek, flung herself toward him, but in an instant, with a deeper cry, she stopped short, pressing her hand to her heart. He had raised his hand, and, with a gesture which had all the spiritual force of a blow, he had cast her off. "Ah, my son, my son!" she cried, with a piteous moan, and looking round at us in wild bewilderment.

"I am not your son!" said the boy, in a voice half stifled with passion. "I give you up! You are not my mother! Don't touch me! You have cheated me—betrayed me—dishonoured me!" In this mad peal of imprecations it was still the note of vanity which rang clearest.

I looked at Mr. Cope—he was deadly pale. He had seen the lad's gesture; he was unable to hear his words. He sat down in the nearest chair and eyed him wonderingly. I hurried to his poor wife's relief; she seemed smitten with a sudden tremor, a deadly chill. She clasped her hands, but she could barely find her voice. "Eustace—my boy—my darling—my own—do you know

what you say? Listen, listen, Eustace. It's all for you—that you should love me more. I have done my best. I seem to have been hasty, but hasty to do for you—to do for you——" Her strength deserted her; she burst into tears. "He curses me—he denies me!" she cried. "He has killed me!"

"Cry, cry!" Eustace retorted; "cry as I have been crying! But don't be falser than you have been. That you couldn't even wait! And you prate of my happiness! Is my happiness in a ruined home—in a disputed heart—in a bullying stepfather! You have chosen him big and strong! Cry your eyes out—you are no mother of mine."

"He's killing me—he's killing me," groaned his mother. "Oh heavens, if I dared to speak I should kill *him!*" She turned to her husband. "Go to him—go to him!" she cried. He's ill, he's mad—he doesn't know what he says. Take his hand in yours—look at him, soothe him, cure him. It's the hot weather," she rambled on. "Let him feel your touch! Eustace, Eustace, be cured!"

Poor Mr. Cope had risen to his feet, passing his handkerchief over his forehead, on which the perspiration stood in great drops. He went slowly towards the young man, bending his eyes on him half in entreaty, half in command. Before him he stopped and frankly held out his hand. Eustace glared at him defiantly, from head to foot, him and his proffered friendship, pressed upon him as it was in the kindest, wisest, firmest way. Then pushing his hand savagely down, "Hypocrite!" he roared close to his face—

"can you hear that?" and marched straight out of the room. Mr. Cope shook his head with a world of tragic meaning, and for an instant exchanged with his wife a long look, brimming with anguish. She fell upon his neck with passionate sobs. But soon recovering herself, "Go to him," she repeated, "follow him; say everything, spare nothing. No matter for me; I have got *my* blow."

VI.

I HELPED her up to her room; her strength had completely left her; she only half undressed and let me lay her on her bed. She was in a state of the intensest excitement; every nerve in her body was thrilling and quivering. She kept murmuring to herself, with a kind of heart-breaking incoherency. "Nothing can hurt me now; I needn't be spared. Nothing can disgrace me—or grace me. I have got my blow. It's my fault—all, all, all! I heaped up folly on folly and weakness on weakness. My heart's broken; it will never be of any use again. You have been right, my dear—I perverted him, I taught him to strike. Oh what a blow! He's hard—he's hard. He's cruel. He has no heart. He is blind with vanity and egotism. But it matters little now; I shan't live to suffer. I have suffered enough. I am dying, my friend, I am dying."

In this broken strain the poor lady poured out the bitterness of her grief. I used every art to soothe and console her, but I felt that the tenderest

spot in her gentle nature had received an irreparable bruise. "I don't want to live," she murmured. "I have seen something too dreadful. It could never be patched up; we should never be the same. He has shown his character—isn't it his character? It's bad!"

In spite of my efforts to restore her to calmness she became, not more excited—for her strength seemed to be ebbing and her voice was low—but more painfully and incoherently talkative. Nevertheless, from her distressing murmur I gathered the glimmer of a meaning. She seemed to wish to make a kind of supreme confession. I sat on the edge of her bed, with her hand in mine. From time to time, above her loud whispers, I heard the sound of the two gentlemen's voices. Adjoining her chamber was a large dressing-room; beyond this was Eustace's apartment. The three rooms opened upon a long, uncovered balcony.

Mr. Cope had followed the young man to his own room, and was addressing him in a low, steady voice. Eustace apparently was silent; but there was something sullen and portentous to my ear in this unnatural absence of response.

"What have you thought of me, my friend, all these years?" his mother asked. "Have I seemed to you like other women? I haven't been like others. I have tried to be so—and you see—you see! Let me tell you. It don't matter whether you despise me—I shan't know it. These are my last words; let them be frank."

They were not, however, so frank as she intended. She seemed to lose herself in a dim

wilderness of memories; her faculty wandered, faltered, stumbled. Not from her words—they were ambiguous—but from her silence and from the rebound of my own quickened sympathy, as it were, I guessed the truth. It blossomed into being, vivid and distinct; it flashed a long, illuminating glow upon the past—a lurid light upon the present. Strange it seemed now that my suspicions had been so late to bear fruit; but our imagination is always too timid. Now all things were clear! Heaven knows that in this unpitying light I felt no contempt for the poor woman who lay before me, panting with a supreme disappointment.

Poor victims of destiny—if I could only bring them to terms! For the moment, however, the unhappy mother and wife demanded all my attention. I left her and passed along the balcony, intending to make her husband come to her. The light in Eustace's room showed me the young man and his companion. They sat facing each other, silent for the moment. Mr. Cope's two hands were on his knees, his eyes were fixed on the carpet, his teeth were set—as if, baffled, irate, desperate, he were preparing to play his last card. Eustace was looking at him hard, with a terribly vicious expression. It made me sick. I was on the point of rushing in and forcing them somehow apart, when suddenly Mr. Cope raised his eyes and exchanged with the boy a look with which he seemed to read his very soul. He waved his hand in the air as if to say that he had been patient enough.

"If you were to see yourself as I see you," he said, "you would be immensely surprised; you would know your absurd appearance. Young as you are, you are rotten with arrogance and pride. What would you say if I were to tell you that, least of men, you have reason to be proud? Your stable-boy there has more. There's a leak in your vanity, there's a blot on your scutcheon! You force me to take strong measures. Let me tell you, in the teeth of your monstrous egotism, what you are. You're a——"

I knew what was coming, but I hadn't the heart to hear it. The word, ringing out, overtook my ear as I hurried back to Mrs. Cope. It was followed by a loud, incoherent cry, the sound, prolonged for some moments, of a scuffle, and then the report of a pistol. This was lost in the noise of crashing glass. Mrs. Cope rose erect in bed and shrieked aloud, "He has killed him—and me!" I caught her in my arms; she drew her last breath. I laid her gently on the bed and made my trembling way, by the balcony, to Eustace's room. The first glance reassured me. Neither of the men was visibly injured; the pistol lay smoking on the floor. Eustace had sunk into a chair, with his head buried in his hands. I saw his face burning red through his fingers.

"It's not murder," Mr. Cope said to me as I crossed the threshold, "but it has just missed being suicide. It has been fatal only to the looking-glass." The mirror was shivered.

"It *is* murder," I answered, seizing Eustace by

the arm and forcing him to rise. "You have killed your mother. This is your father!"

My friend paused and looked at me with a triumphant air, as if she was very proud of her effect. Of course I had foreseen it half-an-hour ago. "What a dismal tale!" I said. "But it's interesting. Of course Mrs. Cope recovered."

She was silent an instant. "You are like me," she answered; "your imagination is timid."

"I confess," I rejoined, "I am rather at a loss how to dispose of our friend Eustace. I don't see how the two could very well shake hands—nor yet how they couldn't."

"They did once—and but once. They were for years, each in his way, lonely men. They were never reconciled. The trench had been dug too deep. Even the poor lady buried there didn't avail to fill it up. Yet the son was forgiven—the father never!"

1871.

THE
ROMANCE OF CERTAIN OLD CLOTHES.

I.

TOWARDS the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the Province of Massachusetts a widowed gentlewoman, the mother of three children, by name Mrs. Veronica Wingrave. She had lost her husband early in life, and had devoted herself to the care of her progeny. These young persons grew up in a manner to reward her tenderness and to gratify her highest hopes. The first-born was a son, whom she had called Bernard, in remembrance of his father. The others were daughters—born at an interval of three years apart. Good looks were traditional in the family, and this youthful trio were not likely to allow the tradition to perish. The boy was of that fair and ruddy complexion and that athletic structure which in those days (as in these) were the sign of good English descent—a frank, affectionate young fellow, a deferential son, a patronising brother, a steadfast friend. Clever, however, he was not; the wit of the family had been apportioned chiefly to his sisters. The late Mr. William Wingrave

had been a great reader of Shakespeare, at a time when this pursuit implied more freedom of thought than at the present day, and in a community where it required much courage to patronise the drama even in the closet; and he had wished to call attention to his admiration of the great poet by calling his daughters out of his favourite plays. Upon the elder he had bestowed the romantic name of Rosalind, and the younger he had called Perdita, in memory of a little girl born between them, who had lived but a few weeks.

When Bernard Wingrave came to his sixteenth year his mother put a brave face upon it and prepared to execute her husband's last injunction. This had been a formal command that, at the proper age, his son should be sent out to England, to complete his education at the university of Oxford, where he himself had acquired his taste for elegant literature. It was Mrs. Wingrave's belief that the lad's equal was not to be found in the two hemispheres, but she had the old traditions of literal obedience. She swallowed her sobs, and made up her boy's trunk and his simple provincial outfit, and sent him on his way across the seas. Bernard presented himself at his father's college, and spent five years in England, without great honour, indeed, but with a vast deal of pleasure and no discredit. On leaving the university he made the journey to France. In his twenty-fourth year he took ship for home, prepared to find poor little New England (New England was very small in those days) a very dull, unfashionable residence. But there had been changes at home, as well as in

Mr. Bernard's opinions. He found his mother's house quite habitable, and his sisters grown into two very charming young ladies, with all the accomplishments and graces of the young women of Britain, and a certain native-grown originality and wildness, which, if it was not an accomplishment, was certainly a grace the more. Bernard privately assured his mother that his sisters were fully a match for the most genteel young women in the old country; whereupon poor Mrs. Wingrave, you may be sure, bade them hold up their heads. Such was Bernard's opinion, and such, in a tenfold higher degree, was the opinion of Mr. Arthur Lloyd. This gentleman was a college-mate of Mr. Bernard, a young man of reputable family, of a good person and a handsome inheritance; which latter appurtenance he proposed to invest in trade in the flourishing colony. He and Bernard were sworn friends; they had crossed the ocean together, and the young American had lost no time in presenting him at his mother's house, where he had made quite as good an impression as that which he had received and of which I have just given a hint.

The two sisters were at this time in all the freshness of their youthful bloom; each wearing, of course, this natural brilliancy in the manner that became her best. They were equally dissimilar in appearance and character. Rosalind, the elder—now in her twenty-second year—was tall and white, with calm gray eyes and auburn tresses; a very faint likeness to the Rosalind of Shakespeare's comedy, whom I imagine a brunette

(if you will), but a slender, airy creature, full of the softest, quickest impulses. Miss Wingrave, with her slightly lymphatic fairness, her fine arms, her majestic height, her slow utterance, was not cut out for adventures. She would never have put on a man's jacket and hose; and, indeed, being a very plump beauty, she may have had reasons apart from her natural dignity. Perdita, too, might very well have exchanged the sweet melancholy of her name against something more in consonance with her aspect and disposition. She had the cheek of a gipsy and the eye of an eager child, as well as the smallest waist and lightest foot in all the country of the Puritans. When you spoke to her she never made you wait, as her handsome sister was wont to do (while she looked at you with a cold fine eye), but gave you your choice of a dozen answers before you had uttered half your thought.

The young girls were very glad to see their brother once more; but they found themselves quite able to spare part of their attention for their brother's friend. Among the young men their friends and neighbours, the *belle jeunesse* of the Colony, there were many excellent fellows, several devoted swains, and some two or three who enjoyed the reputation of universal charmers and conquerors. But the homebred arts and somewhat boisterous gallantry of these honest colonists were completely eclipsed by the good looks, the fine clothes, the punctilious courtesy, the perfect elegance, the immense information, of Mr. Arthur Lloyd. He was in reality no paragon; he was a capable, honourable, civil youth, rich in pounds

sterling, in his health and complacency and his little capital of uninvested affections. But he was a gentleman ; he had a handsome person ; he had studied and travelled ; he spoke French, he played the flute, and he read verses aloud with very great taste. There were a dozen reasons why Miss Wingrave and her sister should have thought their other male acquaintance made but a poor figure before such a perfect man of the world. Mr. Lloyd's anecdotes told our little New England maidens a great deal more of the ways and means of people of fashion in European capitals than he had any idea of doing. It was delightful to sit by and hear him and Bernard talk about the fine people and fine things they had seen. They would all gather round the fire after tea, in the little wainscoted parlour, and the two young men would remind each other, across the rug, of this, that and the other adventure. Rosalind and Perdita would often have given their ears to know exactly what adventure it was, and where it happened, and who was there, and what the ladies had on ; but in those days a well-bred young woman was not expected to break into the conversation of her elders, or to ask too many questions ; and the poor girls used therefore to sit fluttering behind the more languid—or more discreet—curiosity of their mother.

II.

THAT they were both very fine girls Arthur Lloyd was not slow to discover ; but it took him some time to make up his mind whether he liked the

big sister or the little sister best. He had a strong presentiment—an emotion of a nature entirely too cheerful to be called a foreboding—that he was destined to stand up before the parson with one of them; yet he was unable to arrive at a preference, and for such a consummation a preference was certainly necessary, for Lloyd had too much young blood in his veins to make a choice by lot and be cheated of the satisfaction of falling in love. He resolved to take things as they came—to let his heart speak. Meanwhile he was on a very pleasant footing. Mrs. Wingrave showed a dignified indifference to his "intentions," equally remote from a carelessness of her daughter's honour and from that sharp alacrity to make him come to the point, which, in his quality of young man of property, he had too often encountered in the worldly matrons of his native islands. As for Bernard, all that he asked was that his friend should treat his sisters as his own; and as for the poor girls themselves, however each may have secretly longed that their visitor should do or say something "marked," they kept a very modest and contented demeanour.

Towards each other, however, they were somewhat more on the offensive. They were good friends enough, and accommodating bedfellows (they shared the same four-poster), betwixt whom it would take more than a day for the seeds of jealousy to sprout and bear fruit; but they felt that the seeds had been sown on the day that Mr. Lloyd came into the house. Each made up her mind that, if she should be slighted, she would

bear her grief in silence, and that no one should be any the wiser; for if they had a great deal of ambition, they had also a large share of pride. But each prayed in secret, nevertheless, that upon *her* the selection, the distinction, might fall. They had need of a vast deal of patience, of self-control, of dissimulation. In those days a young girl of decent breeding could make no advances whatever, and barely respond, indeed, to those that were made. She was expected to sit still in her chair, with her eyes on the carpet, watching the spot where the mystic handkerchief should fall. Poor Arthur Lloyd was obliged to carry on his wooing in the little wainscoted parlour, before the eyes of Mrs. Wingrave, her son, and his prospective sister-in-law. But youth and love are so cunning that a hundred signs and tokens might travel to and fro, and not one of these three pairs of eyes detect them in their passage. The two maidens were almost always together, and had plenty of chances to betray themselves. That each knew she was being watched, however, made not a grain of difference in the little offices they mutually rendered, or in the various household tasks they performed in common. Neither flinched nor fluttered beneath the silent battery of her sister's eyes. The only apparent change in their habits was that they had less to say to each other. It was impossible to talk about Mr. Lloyd, and it was ridiculous to talk about anything else. By tacit agreement they began to wear all their choice finery, and to devise such little implements of conquest, in the way of ribbons and top-knots and kerchiefs, as were sanc-

tioned by indubitable modesty. They executed in the same inarticulate fashion a contract of fair play in this exciting game. "Is it better so?" Rosalind would ask, tying a bunch of ribbons on her bosom, and turning about from her glass to her sister. Perdita would look up gravely from her work and examine the decoration. "I think you had better give it another loop," she would say, with great solemnity, looking hard at her sister with eyes that added, "upon my honour!" So they were for ever stitching and trimming their petticoats, and pressing out their muslins, and contriving washes and ointments and cosmetics, like the ladies in the household of the vicar of Wakefield. Some three or four months went by; it grew to be midwinter, and as yet Rosalind knew that if Perdita had nothing more to boast of than she, there was not much to be feared from her rivalry. But Perdita by this time—the charming Perdita—felt that her secret had grown to be tenfold more precious than her sister's.

One afternoon Miss Wingrave sat alone—that was a rare accident—before her toilet-glass, combing out her long hair. It was getting too dark to see; she lit the two candles in their sockets, on the frame of her mirror, and then went to the window to draw her curtains. It was a gray December evening; the landscape was bare and bleak, and the sky heavy with snow-clouds. At the end of the large garden into which her window looked was a wall with a little postern door, opening into a lane. The door stood ajar, as she could vaguely see in the gathering darkness, and moved

slowly to and fro, as if some one were swaying it from the lane without. It was doubtless a servant-maid who had been having a tryst with her sweetheart. But as she was about to drop her curtain Rosalind saw her sister step into the garden and hurry along the path which led to the house. She dropped the curtain, all save a little crevice for her eyes. As Perdita came up the path she seemed to be examining something in her hand, holding it close to her eyes. When she reached the house she stopped a moment, looked intently at the object, and pressed it to her lips.

Poor Rosalind slowly came back to her chair and sat down before her glass, where, if she had looked at it less abstractedly, she would have seen her handsome features sadly disfigured by jealousy. A moment afterwards the door opened behind her and her sister came into the room, out of breath, her cheeks aglow with the chilly air.

Perdita started. "Ah," said she, "I thought you were with our mother." The ladies were to go to a tea-party, and on such occasions it was the habit of one of the girls to help their mother to dress. Instead of coming in, Perdita lingered at the door.

"Come in, come in," said Rosalind. "We have more than an hour yet. I should like you very much to give a few strokes to my hair." She knew that her sister wished to retreat, and that she could see in the glass all her movements in the room. "Nay, just help me with my hair," she said, "and I will go to mamma."

Perdita came reluctantly, and took the brush. She saw her sister's eyes, in the glass, fastened

hard upon her hands. She had not made three passes when Rosalind clapped her own right hand upon her sister's left, and started out of her chair. "Whose ring is that?" she cried, passionately, drawing her towards the light.

On the young girl's third finger glistened a little gold ring, adorned with a very small sapphire. Perdita felt that she need no longer keep her secret, yet that she must put a bold face on her avowal. "It's mine," she said proudly.

"Who gave it to you?" cried the other.

Perdita hesitated a moment. "Mr. Lloyd."

"Mr. Lloyd is generous, all of a sudden."

"Ah no," cried Perdita, with spirit, "not all of a sudden! He offered it to me a month ago."

"And you needed a month's begging to take it?" said Rosalind, looking at the little trinket, which indeed was not especially elegant, although it was the best that the jeweller of the Province could furnish. "I wouldn't have taken it in less than two."

"It isn't the ring," Perdita answered, "it's what it means!"

"It means that you are not a modest girl!" cried Rosalind. "Pray, does your mother know of your intrigue? does Bernard?"

"My mother has approved my 'intrigue,' as you call it. Mr. Lloyd has asked for my hand, and mamma has given it. Would you have had him apply to you, dearest sister?"

Rosalind gave her companion a long look, full of passionate envy and sorrow. Then she dropped her lashes on her pale cheeks and turned away. Perdita felt that it had not been a pretty scene;

but it was her sister's fault. However, the elder girl rapidly called back her pride, and turned herself about again. "You have my very best wishes," she said, with a low curtsey. "I wish you every happiness, and a very long life."

Perdita gave a bitter laugh. "Don't speak in that tone!" she cried. "I would rather you should curse me outright. Come, Rosy," she added, "he couldn't marry both of us."

"I wish you very great joy," Rosalind repeated, mechanically, sitting down to her glass again, "and a very long life, and plenty of children."

There was something in the sound of these words not at all to Perdita's taste. "Will you give me a year to live at least?" she said. "In a year I can have one little boy—or one little girl at least. If you will give me your brush again I will do your hair."

"Thank you," said Rosalind. "You had better go to mamma. It isn't becoming that a young lady with a promised husband should wait on a girl with none."

"Nay," said Perdita, good-humouredly, "I have Arthur to wait upon me. You need my service more than I need yours."

But her sister motioned her away, and she left the room. When she had gone poor Rosalind fell on her knees before her dressing-table, buried her head in her arms, and poured out a flood of tears and sobs. She felt very much the better for this effusion of sorrow. When her sister came back she insisted on helping her to dress—on her wearing her prettiest things. She forced upon

her acceptance a bit of lace of her own, and declared that now that she was to be married she should do her best to appear worthy of her lover's choice. She discharged these offices in stern silence; but, such as they were, they had to do duty as an apology and an atonement; she never made any other.

Now that Lloyd was received by the family as an accepted suitor nothing remained but to fix the wedding-day. It was appointed for the following April, and in the interval preparations were diligently made for the marriage. Lloyd, on his side, was busy with his commercial arrangements, and with establishing a correspondence with the great mercantile house to which he had attached himself in England. He was therefore not so frequent a visitor at Mrs. Wingrave's as during the months of his diffidence and irresolution, and poor Rosalind had less to suffer than she had feared from the sight of the mutual endearments of the young lovers. Touching his future sister-in-law Lloyd had a perfectly clear conscience. There had not been a particle of love-making between them, and he had not the slightest suspicion that he had dealt her a terrible blow. He was quite at his ease; life promised so well, both domestically and financially. The great revolt of the Colonies was not yet in the air, and that his connubial felicity should take a tragic turn it was absurd, it was blasphemous, to apprehend. Meanwhile, at Mrs. Wingrave's, there was a greater rustling of silks, a more rapid clicking of scissors and flying of needles, than ever. The good lady

had determined that her daughter should carry from home the genteelest outfit that her money could buy or that the country could furnish. All the sage women in the Province were convened, and their united taste was brought to bear on Perdita's wardrobe. Rosalind's situation, at this moment, was assuredly not to be envied. The poor girl had an inordinate love of dress, and the very best taste in the world, as her sister perfectly well knew. Rosalind was tall, she was stately and sweeping, she was made to carry stiff brocade and masses of heavy lace, such as belong to the toilet of a rich man's wife. But Rosalind sat aloof, with her beautiful arms folded and her head averted, while her mother and sister and the venerable women aforesaid worried and wondered over their materials, oppressed by the multitude of their resources. One day there came in a beautiful piece of white silk, brocaded with heavenly blue and silver, sent by the bridegroom himself—it not being thought amiss in those days that the husband-elect should contribute to the bride's trousseau. Perdita could think of no form or fashion which would do sufficient honour to the splendour of the material.

"Blue's your colour, sister, more than mine," she said, with appealing eyes. "It's a pity it's not for you. You would know what to do with it."

Rosalind got up from her place and looked at the great shining fabric, as it lay spread over the back of a chair. Then she took it up in her hands and felt it—lovingly, as Perdita could see—and turned about toward the mirror with it. She let

it roll down to her feet, and flung the other end over her shoulder, gathering it in about her waist with her white arm, which was bare to the elbow. She threw back her head, and looked at her image, and a hanging tress of her auburn hair fell upon the gorgeous surface of the silk. It made a dazzling picture. The women standing about uttered a little "Look, look!" of admiration. "Yes, indeed," said Rosalind, quietly, "blue is my colour." But Perdita could see that her fancy had been stirred, and that she would now fall to work and solve all their silken riddles. And indeed she behaved very well, as Perdita, knowing her insatiable love of millinery, was quite ready to declare. Innumerable yards of lustrous silk and satin, of muslin, velvet and lace, passed through her cunning hands, without a jealous word coming from her lips. Thanks to her industry, when the wedding-day came Perdita was prepared to espouse more of the vanities of life than any fluttering young bride who had yet received the sacramental blessing of a New England divine.

It had been arranged that the young couple should go out and spend the first days of their wedded life at the country-house of an English gentleman—a man of rank and a very kind friend to Arthur Lloyd. He was a bachelor; he declared he should be delighted to give up the place to the influence of Hymen. After the ceremony at church—it had been performed by an English clergyman—young Mrs. Lloyd hastened back to her mother's house to change her nuptial robes for a riding-dress. Rosalind helped her to effect the

change, in the little homely room in which they had spent their undivided younger years. Perdita then hurried off to bid farewell to her mother, leaving Rosalind to follow. The parting was short; the horses were at the door, and Arthur was impatient to start. But Rosalind had not followed, and Perdita hastened back to her room, opening the door abruptly. Rosalind, as usual, was before the glass, but in a position which caused the other to stand still, amazed. She had dressed herself in Perdita's cast-off wedding veil and wreath, and on her neck she had hung the full string of pearls which the young girl had received from her husband as a wedding-gift. These things had been hastily laid aside, to await their possessor's disposal on her return from the country. Bedizened in this unnatural garb Rosalind stood before the mirror, plunging a long look into its depths and reading heaven knows what audacious visions. Perdita was horrified. It was a hideous image of their old rivalry come to life again. She made a step toward her sister, as if to pull off the veil and the flowers. But catching her eyes in the glass, she stopped.

"Farewell, sweetheart," she said. "You might at least have waited till I had got out of the house!" And she hurried away from the room.

Mr. Lloyd had purchased in Boston a house which to the taste of those days appeared as elegant as it was commodious; and here he very soon established himself with his young wife. He was thus separated by a distance of twenty miles from the residence of his mother-in-law. Twenty

miles, in that primitive era of roads and conveyances, were as serious a matter as a hundred at the present day, and Mrs. Wingrave saw but little of her daughter during the first twelvemonth of her marriage. She suffered in no small degree from Perdita's absence; and her affliction was not diminished by the fact that Rosalind had fallen into terribly low spirits and was not to be roused or cheered but by change of air and company. The real cause of the young lady's dejection the reader will not be slow to suspect. Mrs. Wingrave and her gossips, however, deemed her complaint a mere bodily ill, and doubted not that she would obtain relief from the remedy just mentioned. Her mother accordingly proposed, on her behalf, a visit to certain relatives on the paternal side, established in New York, who had long complained that they were able to see so little of their New England cousins. Rosalind was despatched to these good people, under a suitable escort, and remained with them for several months. In the interval her brother Bernard, who had begun the practice of the law, made up his mind to take a wife. Rosalind came home to the wedding, apparently cured of her heartache, with bright roses and lilies in her face and a proud smile on her lips. Arthur Lloyd came over from Boston to see his brother-in-law married, but without his wife, who was expecting very soon to present him with an heir. It was nearly a year since Rosalind had seen him. She was glad—she hardly knew why—that Perdita had stayed at home. Arthur looked happy, but he was more grave and import-

ant than before his marriage. She thought he looked "interesting,"—for although the word, in its modern sense, was not then invented, we may be sure that the idea was. The truth is, he was simply anxious about his wife and her coming ordeal. Nevertheless, he by no means failed to observe Rosalind's beauty and splendour, and to note how she effaced the poor little bride. The allowance that Perdita had enjoyed for her dress had now been transferred to her sister, who turned it to wonderful account. On the morning after the wedding he had a lady's saddle put on the horse of the servant who had come with him from town, and went out with the young girl for a ride. It was a keen, clear morning in January; the ground was bare and hard, and the horses in good condition—to say nothing of Rosalind, who was charming in her hat and plume, and her dark blue riding coat, trimmed with fur. They rode all the morning, they lost their way, and were obliged to stop for dinner at a farm-house. The early winter dusk had fallen when they got home. Mrs. Wingrave met them with a long face. A messenger had arrived at noon from Mrs. Lloyd; she was beginning to be ill, she desired her husband's immediate return. The young man, at the thought that he had lost several hours, and that by hard riding he might already have been with his wife, uttered a passionate oath. He barely consented to stop for a mouthful of supper, but mounted the messenger's horse and started off at a gallop.

He reached home at midnight. His wife had

been delivered of a little girl. "Ah, why weren't you with me?" she said, as he came to her bedside.

"I was out of the house when the man came. I was with Rosalind," said Lloyd, innocently.

Mrs. Lloyd made a little moan, and turned away. But she continued to do very well, and for a week her improvement was uninterrupted. Finally, however, through some indiscretion in the way of diet or exposure, it was checked, and the poor lady grew rapidly worse. Lloyd was in despair. It very soon became evident that she was breathing her last. Mrs. Lloyd came to a sense of her approaching end, and declared that she was reconciled with death. On the third evening after the change took place she told her husband that she felt she should not get through the night. She dismissed her servants, and also requested her mother to withdraw—Mrs. Wingrave having arrived on the preceding day. She had had her infant placed on the bed beside her, and she lay on her side, with the child against her breast, holding her husband's hands. The night-lamp was hidden behind the heavy curtains of the bed, but the room was illumined with a red glow from the immense fire of logs on the hearth.

"It seems strange not to be warmed into life by such a fire as that," the young woman said, feebly trying to smile. "If I had but a little of it in my veins! But I have given all *my* fire to this little spark of mortality." And she dropped her eyes on her child. Then raising them she looked at her husband with a long, penetrating gaze. The last feeling which lingered in her

heart was one of suspicion. She had not recovered from the shock which Arthur had given her by telling her that in the hour of her agony he had been with Rosalind. She trusted her husband very nearly as well as she loved him; but now that she was called away for ever she felt a cold horror of her sister. She felt in her soul that Rosalind had never ceased to be jealous of her good fortune; and a year of happy security had not effaced the young girl's image, dressed in her wedding-garments, and smiling with simulated triumph. Now that Arthur was to be alone, what might not Rosalind attempt? She was beautiful, she was engaging; what arts might she not use, what impression might she not make upon the young man's saddened heart? Mrs. Lloyd looked at her husband in silence. It seemed hard, after all, to doubt of his constancy. His fine eyes were filled with tears; his face was convulsed with weeping; the clasp of his hands was warm and passionate. How noble he looked, how tender, how faithful and devoted! "Nay," thought Perdita, "he's not for such a one as Rosalind. He'll never forget me. Nor does Rosalind truly care for him; she cares only for vanities and finery and jewels." And she lowered her eyes on her white hands, which her husband's liberality had covered with rings, and on the lace ruffles which trimmed the edge of her night-dress. "She covets my rings and my laces more than she covets my husband."

At this moment the thought of her sister's rapacity seemed to cast a dark shadow between

her and the helpless figure of her little girl. "Arthur," she said, "you must take off my rings. I shall not be buried in them. One of these days my daughter shall wear them—my rings and my laces and silks. I had them all brought out and shown me to-day. It's a great wardrobe—there's not such another in the Province; I can say it without vanity, now that I have done with it. It will be a great inheritance for my daughter when she grows into a young woman. There are things there that a man never buys twice, and if they are lost you will never again see the like. So you will watch them well. Some dozen things I have left to Rosalind; I have named them to my mother. I have given her that blue and silver; it was meant for her; I wore it only once, I looked ill in it. But the rest are to be sacredly kept for this little innocent. It's such a providence that she should be my colour; she can wear my gowns; she has her mother's eyes. You know the same fashions come back every twenty years. She can wear my gowns as they are. They will lie there quietly waiting till she grows into them—wrapped in camphor and rose-leaves, and keeping their colours in the sweet-scented darkness. She shall have black hair, she shall wear my carnation satin. Do you promise me, Arthur?"

"Promise you what, dearest?"

"Promise me to keep your poor little wife's old gowns."

"Are you afraid I shall sell them?"

"No, but that they may get scattered. My mother will have them properly wrapped up, and

you shall lay them away under a double-lock. Do you know the great chest in the attic, with the iron bands? There is no end to what it will hold. You can put them all there. My mother and the housekeeper will do it, and give you the key. And you will keep the key in your secretary, and never give it to any one but your child. Do you promise me?"

"Ah, yes, I promise you," said Lloyd, puzzled at the intensity with which his wife appeared to cling to this idea.

"Will you swear?" repeated Perdita.

"Yes, I swear."

"Well—I trust you—I trust you," said the poor lady, looking into his eyes with eyes in which, if he had suspected her vague apprehensions, he might have read an appeal quite as much as an assurance.

Lloyd bore his bereavement rationally and manfully. A month after his wife's death, in the course of business, circumstances arose which offered him an opportunity of going to England. He took advantage of it, to change the current of his thoughts. He was absent nearly a year, during which his little girl was tenderly nursed and guarded by her grandmother. On his return he had his house again thrown open, and announced his intention of keeping the same state as during his wife's lifetime. It very soon came to be predicted that he would marry again, and there were at least a dozen young women of whom one may say that it was by no fault of theirs that, for six months after his return, the prediction did

not come true. During this interval he still left his little daughter in Mrs. Wingrave's hands, the latter assuring him that a change of residence at so tender an age would be full of danger for her health. Finally, however, he declared that his heart longed for his daughter's presence and that she must be brought up to town. He sent his coach and his housekeeper to fetch her home. Mrs. Wingrave was in terror lest something should befall her on the road; and, in accordance with this feeling, Rosalind offered to accompany her. She could return the next day. So she went up to town with her little niece, and Mr. Lloyd met her on the threshold of his house, overcome with her kindness and with paternal joy. Instead of returning the next day Rosalind stayed out the week; and when at last she reappeared, she had only come for her clothes. Arthur would not hear of her coming home, nor would the baby. That little person cried and choked if Rosalind left her; and at the sight of her grief Arthur lost his wits, and swore that she was going to die. In fine, nothing would suit them but that the aunt should remain until the little niece had grown used to strange faces.

It took two months to bring this consummation about; for it was not until this period had elapsed that Rosalind took leave of her brother-in-law. Mrs. Wingrave had shaken her head over her daughter's absence; she had declared that it was not becoming, that it was the talk of the whole country. She had reconciled herself to it only because, during the girl's visit, the household

enjoyed an unwonted term of peace. Bernard Wingrave had brought his wife home to live, between whom and her sister-in-law there was as little love as you please. Rosalind was perhaps no angel; but in the daily practice of life she was a sufficiently good-natured girl, and if she quarrelled with Mrs. Bernard, it was not without provocation. Quarrel, however, she did, to the great annoyance not only of her antagonist, but of the two spectators of these constant altercations. Her stay in the household of her brother-in-law, therefore, would have been delightful, if only because it removed her from contact with the object of her antipathy at home. It was doubly —it was ten times—delightful, in that it kept her near the object of her early passion. Mrs. Lloyd's sharp suspicions had fallen very far short of the truth. Rosalind's sentiment had been a passion at first, and a passion it remained—a passion of whose radiant heat, tempered to the delicate state of his feelings, Mr. Lloyd very soon felt the influence. Lloyd, as I have hinted, was not a modern Petrarch; it was not in his nature to practise an ideal constancy. He had not been many days in the house with his sister-in-law before he began to assure himself that she was, in the language of that day, a devilish fine woman. Whether Rosalind really practised those insidious arts that her sister had been tempted to impute to her it is needless to inquire. It is enough to say that she found means to appear to the very best advantage. She used to seat herself every morning before the big fireplace in the dining-

room, at work upon a piece of tapestry, with her little niece disporting herself on the carpet at her feet, or on the train of her dress, and playing with her woollen balls. Lloyd would have been a very stupid fellow if he had remained insensible to the rich suggestions of this charming picture. He was exceedingly fond of his little girl, and was never weary of taking her in his arms and tossing her up and down, and making her crow with delight. Very often, however, he would venture upon greater liberties than the young lady was yet prepared to allow, and then she would suddenly vociferate her displeasure. Rosalind, at this, would drop her tapestry, and put out her handsome hands with the serious smile of the young girl whose virgin fancy has revealed to her all a mother's healing arts. Lloyd would give up the child, their eyes would meet, their hands would touch, and Rosalind would extinguish the little girl's sobs upon the snowy folds of the kerchief that crossed her bosom. Her dignity was perfect, and nothing could be more discreet than the manner in which she accepted her brother-in-law's hospitality. It may almost be said, perhaps, that there was something harsh in her reserve. Lloyd had a provoking feeling that she was in the house and yet was unapproachable. Half-an-hour after supper, at the very outset of the long winter evenings, she would light her candle, make the young man a most respectful curtsey, and march off to bed. If these were arts, Rosalind was a great artist. But their effect was so gentle, so gradual, they were calculated to work upon the

young widower's fancy with a *crescendo* so finely shaded, that, as the reader has seen, several weeks elapsed before Rosalind began to feel sure that her returns would cover her outlay. When this became morally certain she packed up her trunk and returned to her mother's house. For three days she waited ; on the fourth Mr. Lloyd made his appearance—a respectful but pressing suitor. Rosalind heard him to the end, with great humility, and accepted him with infinite modesty. It is hard to imagine that Mrs. Lloyd would have forgiven her husband ; but if anything might have disarmed her resentment it would have been the ceremonious continence of this interview. Rosalind imposed upon her lover but a short probation. They were married, as was becoming, with great privacy—almost with secrecy—in the hope perhaps, as was waggishly remarked at the time, that the late Mrs. Lloyd wouldn't hear of it.

The marriage was to all appearance a happy one, and each party obtained what each had desired—Lloyd "a devilish fine woman," and Rosalind—but Rosalind's desires, as the reader will have observed, had remained a good deal of a mystery. There were, indeed, two blots upon their felicity, but time would perhaps efface them. During the first three years of her marriage Mrs. Lloyd failed to become a mother, and her husband on his side suffered heavy losses of money. This latter circumstance compelled a material retrenchment in his expenditure, and Rosalind was perforce less of a fine lady than her sister had been. She contrived, however, to carry it like a woman of

considerable fashion. She had long since ascertained that her sister's copious wardrobe had been sequestrated for the benefit of her daughter, and that it lay languishing in thankless gloom in the dusty attic. It was a revolting thought that these exquisite fabrics should await the good pleasure of a little girl who sat in a high chair and ate bread-and-milk with a wooden spoon. Rosalind had the good taste, however, to say nothing about the matter until several months had expired. Then, at last, she timidly broached it to her husband. Was it not a pity that so much finery should be lost?—for lost it would be, what with colours fading, and moths eating it up, and the change of fashions. But Lloyd gave her so abrupt and peremptory a refusal, that she saw, for the present, her attempt was vain. Six months went by, however, and brought with them new needs and new visions. Rosalind's thoughts hovered lovingly about her sister's relics. She went up and looked at the chest in which they lay imprisoned. There was a sullen defiance in its three great padlocks and its iron bands which only quickened her cupidity. There was something exasperating in its incorruptible immobility. It was like a grim and grizzled old household servant, who locks his jaws over a family secret. And then there was a look of capacity in its vast extent, and a sound as of dense fulness, when Rosalind knocked its side with the toe of her little shoe, which caused her to flush with baffled longing. "It's absurd," she cried; "it's improper, it's wicked"; and she forthwith resolved upon

another attack upon her husband. On the following day, after dinner, when he had had his wine, she boldly began it. But he cut her short with great sternness.

"Once for all, Rosalind," said he, "it's out of the question. I shall be gravely displeased if you return to the matter."

"Very good," said Rosalind. "I am glad to learn the esteem in which I am held. Gracious heaven," she cried, "I am a very happy woman! It's an agreeable thing to feel one's self sacrificed to a caprice!" And her eyes filled with tears of anger and disappointment.

Lloyd had a good-natured man's horror of a woman's sobs, and he attempted—I may say he condescended—to explain. "It's not a caprice, dear, it's a promise," he said—"an oath."

"An oath? It's a pretty matter for oaths! and to whom, pray?"

"To Perdita," said the young man, raising his eyes for an instant, but immediately dropping them.

"Perdita—ah, Perdita!" and Rosalind's tears broke forth. Her bosom heaved with stormy sobs—sobs which were the long-deferred sequel of the violent fit of weeping in which she had indulged herself on the night when she discovered her sister's betrothal. She had hoped, in her better moments, that she had done with her jealousy; but her temper, on that occasion, had taken an ineffaceable fold. "And pray, what right had Perdita to dispose of my future?" she cried. "What right had she to bind you to meanness

and cruelty? Ah, I occupy a dignified place, and I make a very fine figure! I am welcome to what Perdita has left! And what has she left? I never knew till now how little! Nothing, nothing, nothing."

This was very poor logic, but it was very good as a "scene." Lloyd put his arm around his wife's waist and tried to kiss her, but she shook him off with magnificent scorn. Poor fellow! he had coveted a "devilish fine woman," and he had got one. Her scorn was intolerable. He walked away with his ears tingling—irresolute, distracted. Before him was his secretary, and in it the sacred key which with his own hand he had turned in the triple lock. He marched up and opened it, and took the key from a secret drawer, wrapped in a little packet which he had sealed with his own honest bit of blazonry. *Je garde*, said the motto—"I keep." But he was ashamed to put it back. He flung it upon the table beside his wife.

"Put it back!" she cried. "I want it not. I hate it!"

"I wash my hands of it," cried her husband. "God forgive me!"

Mrs. Lloyd gave an indignant shrug of her shoulders, and swept out of the room, while the young man retreated by another door. Ten minutes later Mrs. Lloyd returned, and found the room occupied by her little step-daughter and the nursery-maid. The key was not on the table. She glanced at the child. Her little niece was perched on a chair, with the packet in her hands. She had broken the seal with her own small

fingers. Mrs. Lloyd hastily took possession of the key.

At the habitual supper-hour Arthur Lloyd came back from his counting-room. It was the month of June, and supper was served by daylight. The meal was placed on the table, but Mrs. Lloyd failed to make her appearance. The servant whom his master sent to call her came back with the assurance that her room was empty, and that the women informed him that she had not been seen since dinner. They had, in truth, observed her to have been in tears, and, supposing her to be shut up in her chamber, had not disturbed her. Her husband called her name in various parts of the house, but without response. At last it occurred to him that he might find her by taking the way to the attic. The thought gave him a strange feeling of discomfort, and he bade his servants remain behind, wishing no witness in his quest. He reached the foot of the staircase leading to the topmost flat, and stood with his hand on the banisters, pronouncing his wife's name. His voice trembled. He called again louder and more firmly. The only sound which disturbed the absolute silence was a faint echo of his own tones, repeating his question under the great eaves. He nevertheless felt irresistibly moved to ascend the staircase. It opened upon a wide hall, lined with wooden closets, and terminating in a window which looked westward, and admitted the last rays of the sun. Before the window stood the great chest. Before the chest, on her knees, the young man saw with amazement and horror

the figure of his wife. In an instant he crossed the interval between them, bereft of utterance. The lid of the chest stood open, exposing, amid their perfumed napkins, its treasure of stuffs and jewels. Rosalind had fallen backward from a kneeling posture, with one hand supporting her on the floor and the other pressed to her heart. On her limbs was the stiffness of death, and on her face, in the fading light of the sun, the terror of something more than death. Her lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her blanched brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands.

1868.

A MOST EXTRAORDINARY CASE.

I.

LATE in the spring of the year 1865, just as the War had come to an end, a young invalid officer lay in bed in one of the uppermost chambers of one of the great New York hotels. His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of a waiter, who handed him a card superscribed *Mrs. Augustus Mason*, and bearing on its reverse the following words in pencil: "Dear Colonel Mason—I have only just heard of your being here, so ill and alone. It's too dreadful. Do you remember me? Will you see me? If you do, I think you *will* remember me. I insist on coming up.—M. M."

Mason was undressed, unshaven, weak, very feverish. His ugly little bedroom was in a state of confusion which had not even the merit of being picturesque. Mrs. Mason's card was at once a puzzle and a heavenly intimation of comfort. But all that it represented was so dim to the young man's enfeebled perception that it took him some moments to collect his thoughts.

"It's a lady, sir," said the waiter, by way of assisting him.

"Is she young or old?" asked Mason.

"Well, sir, she's a little of both."

"I can't ask a lady to come up here," groaned the invalid.

"Upon my word, sir, you look beautiful," said the waiter. "They like a sick man. And I see she's of your own name," continued Michael, in whom constant service had bred great frankness of speech; "the more shame to her for not coming before!"

Colonel Mason made up his mind that, as the visit had been of Mrs. Mason's own seeking, he would receive her without more ado. "If she doesn't mind it, I am sure I needn't," said the poor fellow, who hadn't the strength to be over-punctilious. So in a very few moments his visitor was ushered up to his bedside. He saw before him a handsome, middle-aged, fair, stout woman, who displayed no other embarrassment than such as was easily explained by the loss of breath consequent on the ascent of six flights of stairs.

"Do you remember me?" she asked, taking the young man's hand.

He lay back on his pillow and looked at her. "You used to be my aunt—my aunt Maria," he said.

"I am your Aunt Maria still. It's very good of you not to have forgotten me."

"It's very good of you not to have forgotten *me*," said Mason, in a tone which betrayed a deeper feeling than the simple wish to return a civil speech.

"Dear me, you have had the war and a hundred dreadful things. I have been living in Europe,

you know. Since my return I have remained in the country, in your uncle's old house, on the river, of which the lease had just expired when I came home. I came to town yesterday on business, and accidentally heard of your condition and of your being in this hole. I knew you had gone into the army, and I had been wondering a dozen times what had become of you, and whether you wouldn't turn up now that the war is at last over. Of course I didn't lose a moment in coming to you. I'm *so* sorry for you." Mrs. Mason looked about her for a seat. The chairs were encumbered with odds and ends belonging to her nephew's wardrobe, with strange military promiscuities, and with the remnants of his last repast. The good lady surveyed the scene with the mute irony of compassion.

The young man lay watching her comely face in contented submission to whatever form of utterance this feeling might take. "You are the first woman—to call a woman—I have seen in I don't know how many months," he said, contrasting her neat, rich appearance with that of his room, and reading her thoughts.

"I should suppose so. I propose to be very feminine." She disembarrassed one of the chairs, and brought it to the bed. Then, seating herself, she ungloved one of her hands, and laid it softly on the young man's wrist. "What a great full-grown young fellow you have become!" she pursued. "Now, tell me, are you very ill?"

"You must ask the doctor," said Mason. "I really don't know. I am extremely uncomfortable, but I suppose it's partly my circumstances."

"Lord, do you call these circumstances—all these queer things? I have seen the doctor. Mrs. Middlemas is an old friend of mine; and when I come to town I always go to see her. It was from her I learned this morning that you were here in this state. We had begun by rejoicing over the new prospects of peace; and from that, of course, we had got to lamenting the numbers of young men who are to enter upon it with lost limbs and shattered health. It happened that Mrs. Middlemas mentioned several of her husband's patients as examples, and yourself among the number. You were a remarkable young man, miserably sick, without family or friends, and with no asylum but a suffocating little closet in a noisy hotel. You may imagine that I pricked up my ears, and asked your baptismal name. Dr. Middlemas came in and told me. Your name is luckily an uncommon one: it's absurd to suppose that there could be two Ferdinand Masons. In short, I felt that you were my husband's brother's child, and that at last I too might have my little turn at hero-nursing. The little that the Doctor knew of your history agreed with the little that I knew, though I confess I was sorry to hear that you had never spoken of our relationship. But why should you? At all events you have got to acknowledge it now. I regret your not having said something about it before, only because the Doctor might have brought us together a month ago, and you would now have been well."

"It will take more than a month to make me well," said Mason, feeling that, if Mrs. Mason

intended to exert herself on his behalf, she should know the real state of the case. "I never spoke of you, because I had quite lost sight of you. I supposed you were still in Europe; and indeed," he added, after a moment's hesitation, "I heard that you had married again."

"Of course you did," said Mrs. Mason, placidly. "I used to hear it once a month myself. But I had a much better right to suppose that you were married. Thank heaven, however, there's nothing of that sort between us. We can each do as we please. I promise to cure you in a month, in spite of yourself."

"What's your remedy?" asked the young man, with a smile very courteous, considering how sceptical it was.

"My first remedy is to take you out of this horrible *trou*. I talked it all over with Dr. Middlemas. He says you must get into the country. Why, my dear boy, this is enough to kill you outright—one Broadway outside of your window and another outside of your door! Listen to me. My house is directly on the Hudson—only a matter of two hours by rail. You know I have no children. My only companion is my niece, Caroline Hofmann. You shall come and stay with us until you are as strong as you need be—if it takes twenty years. You shall have sweet, cool air, and proper food, and excellent attendance, and the devotion of a sensible woman. I shall not listen to a word of objection. You shall do as you please, get up when you please, dine when you please, go to bed when you please,

and say what you please. I shall ask nothing of you but to let yourself be 'done for.' Do you remember how, when you were a boy at school, after your father's death, you were taken with measles, and your uncle had you brought to our own house? I helped to nurse you myself, and I remember what nice manners you had in the very midst of your measles. Your uncle was very fond of you; and if he had had any considerable property of his own I know he would have remembered you in his will. But of course he couldn't leave away his wife's money. What I wish to do for you is a very small part of what he would have done, if he had only lived and heard of your gallantry and your sufferings. So it's settled. I shall go home this afternoon. To-morrow morning I shall despatch my servant to you with instructions. He's a highly respectable Englishman, he thoroughly knows his business, and he will put up your things and save you every particle of trouble. You have only to let yourself be dressed and driven to the train. I shall, of course, meet you at your journey's end. Now don't tell me you are not strong enough."

"I feel stronger at this moment than I have felt in a dozen weeks," said Mason. "It's useless for me to attempt to thank you."

"Quite useless. I shouldn't listen to you. And I suppose," added Mrs. Mason, looking over the bare walls and scanty furniture of the room, "you pay a fabulous price for this bower of bliss Do you need money?"

The young man shook his head.

"Very well then," resumed Mrs. Mason, conclusively, "from this moment you are my property."

The young man lay speechless from the very fulness of his heart; but he strove by the pressure of his fingers to give her some assurance of his gratitude. His companion rose, and lingered beside him, drawing on her glove, and smiling quietly with the look of a long-baffled philanthropist who has at last discovered an infinite opportunity. Poor Ferdinand's weary visage reflected her smile. Finally, after the lapse of years, he too was being cared for. He let his head sink into the pillow, and silently inhaled the fragrance of her good manners and good nature. He was on the point of taking her dress in his hand and asking her not to leave him—now that solitude would be so much more dismal. His eyes, I suppose, betrayed this touching apprehension—doubly touching in a war-wasted young officer. As she prepared to bid him farewell, Mrs. Mason stooped and kissed his forehead. He listened to the rustle of her dress across the carpet, to the gentle closing of the door and to her retreating footsteps. And then, giving way to his weakness, he put his hands over his face and cried like a homesick school-boy. He had been reminded of the exquisite side of life.

Matters went forward as Mrs. Mason had arranged them. At six o'clock on the following evening Ferdinand found himself deposited at one of the small stations of the Hudson River railroad, exhausted by his journey and yet excited at

the prospect of its drawing to a close. Mrs. Mason was in waiting in a low basket-phaeton, with a magazine of cushions and coverlets. Ferdinand transferred himself to her side, and they drove rapidly homeward. Mrs. Mason's house was a commodious villa, with a circular lawn, a sinuous avenue and a well-grown plantation of shrubbery. As the phaeton drew up before the porch a young lady appeared in the doorway. Mason will be forgiven if he regarded himself as presented *ex officio*, as I may say, to this young lady. Before he really knew it, and in the absence of the servant who, under Mrs. Mason's directions, was busy in the background with his luggage, he had availed himself of her proffered arm, and had allowed her to assist him through the porch, across the hall, and into the parlour, where she graciously consigned him to a sofa which, for his especial use, she had caused to be wheeled up before a fire lighted for his especial comfort. He was unable, however, to take advantage of her good offices. Prudence dictated that without further delay he should betake himself to his room.

II.

On the morning after his arrival he got up early, and made an attempt to be present at breakfast; but his strength failed him, and he was obliged to dress at his leisure and content himself with a simple transition from his bed to his arm-chair. The apartment assigned him was

designedly on the ground-floor, so that he was spared all struggles with the staircase—a charming room, brightly carpeted and upholstered, and marked by a certain fastidious freshness which betrayed the uncontested dominion of women. It had a broad, high window, draped in chintz and crisp muslin and opening upon the greenery of the lawn. At this window, wrapped in his dressing-gown, and lost in the embrace of the most facile of arm-chairs, he slowly discussed his simple repast. Before long his hostess made her appearance on the lawn outside the window. As this quarter of the house was covered with warm sunshine Mason ventured to open the window and talk to her, while she stood on the grass beneath her parasol.

"It's time to think of your physician," she said. "You shall choose for yourself. The great man here is Dr. Gregory, a practitioner of the old school. We have had him but once, for my niece and I have the health of dairy-maids. On that one occasion he—well, he made a fool of himself. His practice is among the 'old families,' and he only knows how to treat certain old-fashioned, obsolete complaints. Anything brought about by the war would be quite out of his range. And then he vacillates, and talks about his own maladies *à lui*. And, to tell the truth, we had a little repartee which makes our relations somewhat ambiguous."

"I see he would never do," said Mason, laughing. "But he's not your only physician?"

"No: there is a young man, a new-comer, a

Dr. Knight, whom I don't know, but of whom I have heard very good things. I confess that I have a prejudice in favour of the new generation. Dr. Knight has a position to establish, and I suppose he's likely to be especially attentive and careful. I believe, moreover, that he has been a surgeon in the army."

"I knew a man of his name," said Mason. "I wonder if this is he. His name was Horace Knight—a fair-haired, near-sighted man."

"I don't know," Mrs. Mason replied; "perhaps Caroline knows." She retreated a few steps, and called to an upper window. "Caroline, what is Dr. Knight's first name?"

Mason listened to Miss Hofmann's answer—"I haven't the least idea."

"Is it Horace?"

"I don't know."

"Is he light or dark?"

"I have never seen him."

"Is he near-sighted?"

"How in the world should I know?"

"I suspect he's as good as any one," said Ferdinand. "With you, my dear aunt, what does the doctor matter?"

Mrs. Mason accordingly sent for Dr. Knight, who, on arrival, turned out to be her nephew's old acquaintance. Although the young men had been united by no greater intimacy than the superficial comradeship resulting from a winter in neighbouring quarters, they were very well pleased to come together again. Horace Knight was a young man of good birth, good looks, good faculties and good

intentions, who, after a three years' practice of surgery in the army, had undertaken to seek his fortune—since evidently none was to come to him unsought—in Mrs. Mason's neighbourhood. His mother, a widow with a small income, had recently removed to the country for economy, and her son had been unwilling to allow her to live alone. This long-settled, almost legendary region, moreover, offered a promising field for a man of energy —a field well stocked with large families of easy income and of those conservative habits which lead people to feel their pulse and look at each other's tongues. The local practitioner had survived the glory of his prime, and was not, perhaps, entirely guiltless of Mrs. Mason's charge that he had not kept up with the progress of the new diseases. The world, in fact, was getting too new for him, as well as for his old patients. He had had money invested in the South—precious sources of revenue, which the war had swallowed up at a gulp; he had grown frightened and nervous and querulous; he had lost his presence of mind and his spectacles in several important conjunctures; he had been repeatedly and distinctly quite out of his reckoning; a vague dissatisfaction pervaded the breasts of his patrons; he was without competitors: in short, fortune was propitious to Dr. Knight. Mason remembered the young surgeon only as an amusing and intelligent companion; but he soon had reason to believe that his medical skill would leave nothing to be desired. He arrived rapidly at a clear understanding of Ferdinand's condition; he asked intelligent questions, and gave simple and

definite instructions. The disorder was obstinate and virulent, but there was no apparent reason why care and prudence should not subdue it.

"Your strength is very much reduced," he said, as he took his hat and gloves to go; "but you must have an excellent constitution. It seems to me, however—if you will pardon my saying so—to be partly your own fault that you have sunk so low. You have opposed no resistance; you haven't cared to get well."

"I confess I haven't—particularly. But I don't see how you should know it."

"Oh, I know everything."

"Well, it was natural enough. Until Mrs. Mason discovered me, I hadn't a friend in the world. I had become demoralised by solitude. I had almost forgotten the difference between sickness and health. I had nothing before my eyes to remind me of what people are supposed to live for—of the motives and interests for the sake of which a man continues in health and recovers from disease. I had forgotten that I ever cared for work or play, or anything but the preservation of my miserable carcass. My carcass had become quite too miserable to be an object worth living for. I was losing time and money at an appalling rate; I was getting worse rather than better; and I therefore gave up resistance. It seemed better to die easy than to die hard. I put this all in the past tense, because within these three days I have become quite another man."

"I wish very much I had known about you," said Knight. "I would have made you come home

with me, if I could have done nothing else. It was certainly not a rose-coloured prospect. But what do you say now?" he continued, looking round the room. "I never have seen anything so pink."

Mason assented with an eloquent smile.

"I congratulate you cordially. Mrs. Mason—if you don't mind my speaking of her—is so thoroughly (and, I should suppose, incorrigibly) philanthropic that it's quite a surprise to find her extremely sensible."

"Yes; and so practical and successful," said Ferdinand, "that it's quite a surprise to find her philanthropic. She's a dear woman."

"But I should say that your especial blessing was your servant. He looks as if he had come out of an English novel."

"My especial blessing! You haven't seen Miss Hofmann, then?"

"Yes: I met her in the hall. She looks as if she had come out of an American novel. I don't know that that's great praise; but, at all events, I make her come out of it."

"You are bound in honour then," said Mason, laughing, "to put her into another."

Mason's impression that he was now very happy needed no enforcement at the Doctor's hands. He felt that it would be his own fault if these quiet, irresponsible days were not among the most delightful of his life. He determined to give himself up without stint to mere convalescence, utterly to vegetate. His illness alone would have been excuse enough for his simply floating with the

tide; but Mason had other reasons for idleness. For three years he had been stretched without intermission on the rack of duty. Although constantly exposed to hard service, it had been his fortune never to receive a serious wound; and, until his health broke down, he had taken fewer holidays than any officer of Volunteers. With an abundance of a certain kind of equanimity and self-control—a faculty of ready self-adaptation to the accomplished fact, in any direction—he was yet in his secret soul a singularly nervous, over-scrupulous being. On the few occasions when he had been absent from the scene of his military duties, although duly authorised and warranted in the act, he had suffered so acutely from the apprehension that something was happening, or was about to happen (some chance for distinction, some augmentation of honour), which not to have witnessed or to have had a hand in would be matter of eternal regret that he can be barely said to have enjoyed his recreation. The sense of lost time was, moreover, his perpetual bugbear—the feeling that precious hours were now fleeting uncounted, which in more congenial labours would suffice for making a lasting mark. This feeling he strove to propitiate as much as possible by assiduous reading and study, in the loathsome leisure of winter-quarters. I cite the fact merely as an evidence of the uninterrupted austerity of his life for a long time before he was laid up. I might triple this period, indeed, by a glance at his college-years, and at certain busy months which intervened between this close of his youth and the opening of

the war. Mason had always laboured. He was fond of work, to begin with; and, in addition, the complete absence of family-ties had allowed him to follow his tastes without hindrance or criticism. This circumstance had been at once a great gain to him and a serious loss. He reached his twenty-seventh year a very accomplished scholar, as scholars go, but a great dunce in certain social matters. He was quite ignorant of all those lighter and more evanescent branches of science attached to being somebody's son, brother or cousin. At last, however, as he reminded himself, he was to discover what it was to be the nephew of somebody's husband. Mrs. Mason was to teach him the meaning of the adjective *domestic*. It would have been hard to learn it in a pleasanter way. Mason felt that he should extract some instruction from his idleness itself, and should probably leave the house a wiser as well as a better man. It became probable, thanks to that quickening of the faculties which accompanies the exercise of the domestic affections, that in this last respect he would not be disappointed. Very few days sufficed to reveal to him the many excellent qualities of his hostess—her warm capacious heart, her fairness of mind, her good temper, her good taste, her large fund of experience and reminiscence, and, indeed, more than all, a certain passionate devotedness, to which fortune, in leaving her a childless widow, had done but scant justice. The two accordingly established a friendship—a friendship that promised as well for the happiness of each as any that ever undertook to meddle with that province. If I were telling

my story from Mrs. Mason's point of view, I might make a very good thing of the statement that this lady had regularly determined to be very fond of my hero; but I am compelled to let it stand in this simple shape. Excellent, charming person that she was, she had every right to the satisfaction which belonged to a liberal yet not exaggerated estimate of her guest. She had divined him—so much the better for her. That it was very much the better for him is obviously one of the elementary facts of my narrative; a fact of which Mason became so rapidly and completely aware that he stopped thinking about it, as one ceases to think of an article of faith.

III.

In the space of ten days, then, most of the nebulous impressions produced by change of scene had gathered into substantial form. Others, however, were still in the nebulous state—diffusing a gentle light upon Ferdinand's path. Chief among these was the mild radiance of which Miss Hofmann was the centre. For three days after his arrival Mason had been confined to his room by the fatigue and fever which inevitably followed his journey. It was not till the fourth day, therefore, that he was able to renew the acquaintance so auspiciously commenced. When at last, at dinner-time, he reappeared in the drawing-room, Miss Hofmann greeted him almost as an old friend. Mason had already discovered that she was young and conciliatory; he now rapidly

advanced to the perception that she was uncommonly pretty. Before dinner was over he had made up his mind that she was a lovely being. Mrs. Mason had found time to give him a full account of her life. She had lost her mother in infancy, and had been adopted by her aunt in the early years of this lady's widowhood. Her father was a man of evil habits—a drunkard, a gambler, a rake, outlawed from decent society. His only dealings with his daughter were to write her every month or two a begging letter, her mother's property having been settled on the girl. Mrs. Mason had taken her niece to Europe, and given her every advantage. She had had an expensive education; she had travelled; she had gone into the world; she had been presented, like a good republican, to sundry European sovereigns; she had been admired; she had had half-a-dozen offers of marriage, to her aunt's knowledge, and others, perhaps, of which she was ignorant, and had refused them all. She was now twenty-five years of age, beautiful, accomplished and conscious of good investments. She was an excellent girl, with a will of her own. "I am very fond of her," Mrs. Mason remarked, "and I suppose she is equally fond of me; but we long ago gave up all idea of playing at mother and daughter. We have never had a disagreement since she was fifteen years old; but we have never had an agreement either. Caroline isn't clinging or dependent. She is honest, good-tempered, and perfectly discriminating. She foresaw that we were still to spend a number of years together, and she wisely declined at the

outset to affect a range of feelings that wouldn't stand the wear and tear of time. She knew that she should make a poor daughter, and she contented herself with being a good niece. I never interfere with her life. She has it quite in her own hands. My position is little more than an affectionate curiosity as to what she will do with it. Of course she will marry, sooner or later; but I am curious to see the man of her choice. In Europe, you know, girls have no acquaintances but such as they share with their parents and guardians; and in that way I know most of the gentlemen who have tried to make themselves acceptable to my niece. There were some nice young men in the number; but there was not one —or, rather, there was but one—for whom Caroline cared a straw. That one she liked, I believe; but they had a quarrel, and she lost him. She has a very nice way of arranging such matters. I am sure no girl ever before got rid of so many admirers with so few scenes of violence. Ah, she's a dear, good girl!" Mrs. Mason pursued. "She has saved me infinite trouble in my day. And when I think what she might have been, with her beauty and her little fortune! She has kept all her *prétendants* as friends. There are two of them who write to her still. She doesn't answer their letters; but once in a while she meets them, and thanks them for writing, and that contents them. The others are married, and Caroline remains single. I suppose it won't last for ever. Still, although she isn't one of the yearning sort, she won't marry a man she doesn't care for, merely

because she's growing old. Indeed, it's only the sentimental girls, to my belief, that do that. They covet a man for his money or his family, and then give the feeling some fine name. But there's one thing, Mr. Ferdinand," added Mrs. Mason, at the end of these remarks, "you will be so good as not to fall in love with my niece. I can assure you that she will not fall in love with you, and a hopeless passion will not hasten your recovery. Caroline is a civilised woman; you can live with her very well without that. She is good for common daylight, and you'll have no need of wax-candles and ecstasies."

"Be easy in your mind," said Ferdinand, laughing. "I'm quite too attentive to myself at present to think of any one else. Miss Hofmann might be dying for a glance of my eye, and I shouldn't hesitate to sacrifice her. To fall in love a man must be all there, and you see I am not."

At the end of ten days summer had fairly set in; and Mason found it possible, and indeed profitable, to spend a large portion of his time in the open air. He was unable either to ride or to walk, and the only form of exercise which he found practicable was an occasional drive in Mrs. Mason's phaeton. On these occasions Mrs. Mason was his usual companion. The neighbourhood offered an interminable succession of beautiful drives; and poor Ferdinand took an immense satisfaction in reclining idly upon a pile of cushions, warmly clad, empty-handed, silent, with only his eyes in motion, and rolling rapidly between fragrant hedges and springing crops,

and beside the outskirts of woods, and along the heights which overlooked the river. Detested war was over, and all nature had ratified the peace. Mason used to gaze up into the cloudless sky until his eyes began to water, and you would have actually supposed he was shedding sentimental tears. Besides these passive wanderings with his hostess, he had adopted another method of inhaling the sunshine. He used frequently to spend several hours at a time on a verandah beside the house, sheltered from the observation of visitors. Here, with an arm-chair and a footstool, a cigar and half-a-dozen volumes of novels, to say nothing of the society of either of the ladies, and sometimes of both, he suffered the mornings to pass unmeasured and uncounted. The chief incident of these mornings was the Doctor's visit, in which, of course, there was a strong element of prose—and very good prose, as I may add, for the Doctor was turning out an excellent fellow. But, for the rest, the summer unrolled itself like a gentle strain of music. Mason knew so little, from direct observation, of the *vie intime* of cultivated, intelligent women, that their habits, their manners, their household motions, possessed in his view all the charm of a spectacle—a spectacle which he watched with the indolence of an invalid, the sympathy of a man of taste, and a little of the awkwardness which women gladly allow, and indeed encourage, in a soldier, for the pleasure of forgiving it. It was a very simple matter to Miss Hofmann that she should be charmingly dressed, that her hands

should be white and her attitudes felicitous: these things for her had long since become mechanical. But to Mason, who was familiar only with books and men, they were objects of constant, half-dreamy contemplation. He would sit for half-an-hour at once, with a book on his knees and the pages unturned, scrutinising with ingenious indirectness the agreeable combination of colour and outline which made up the physical personality of Miss Hofmann. There was no question as to her beauty, or as to its being a warm, sympathetic quality, and not a conventional, superficial perfection. She was the least bit taller than most women, and had an appearance of activity. Her hair was of a dark and lustrous brown, turning almost to black, and lending itself readily to those multitudinous ringlets which were then in fashion. Her forehead was rather high and very clear, and her eyes were of that pure sea-green which you may observe of a summer's afternoon when the declining sun shines through the crest of a wave. Her complexion was the hue of perfect health. These, with her full, mild lips, her generous and flexible figure, her magnificent hands, were items numerous enough to occupy Mason's attention, and it was but seldom that he allowed it to be diverted. Mrs. Mason was frequently called away by her household cares, but Miss Hofmann's time was apparently quite her own. Nevertheless, it came into Ferdinand's head one day that she gave him her company only from a sense of duty, and when, according to his wont, he had allowed this impression to ripen in his mind, he ventured

to assure her that, much as he delighted in her society, he should be sorry to believe that her gracious bestowal of it interfered with more profitable occupation. "I am no companion," he said. "I don't pretend to be one. I sit here deaf and dumb, and blind and halt, patiently waiting to be healed—waiting till vagabond Nature strolls my way and brushes me with the hem of her garment."

"You don't tire me at all," Miss Hofmann had been good enough to reply on this occasion. "What do you take me for? The hero of a hundred fights, a young man who has been reduced to a shadow in the service of his country —I should be very fastidious if I asked for anything better."

"Oh, if it's on theory!" said Mason. And, in spite of Miss Hofmann's protest, he continued to assume that it *was* on theory that she continued to look after him. But she stuck to her post, and with a sort of placid inveteracy which seemed to the young man to betray either a great deal of indifference or a great deal of self-command. "She thinks I am stupid," he said to himself. "Of course she thinks me stupid. How should she think otherwise? She and her aunt have talked me over; Mrs. Mason has enumerated my virtues, and Miss Hofmann has added them up: total, a rather amiable bore. She has armed herself with patience. I must say it becomes her very well." Nothing was more natural, however, than that Mason should exaggerate the effect of his social incapacity. His remarks were desultory, but not infrequent; often trivial, but always good-

humoured and easy to meet. The intervals of silence, indeed, which enlivened his conversation with Miss Hofmann, might have been taken for the natural, familiar pauses in the talk of old friends.

IV.

ONCE in a while she would sit down at the piano and play to him. The verandah communicated with the little sitting-room by means of a long window, one side of which stood open. Mason would move his chair to this aperture, so that he might see the music as well as hear it. Seated at the instrument, at the farther end of the half-darkened room, with her figure in half-profile, and her features, her movements, the colour of her dress, but half defined in the cool obscurity, Miss Hofmann would wake up the echoes of Schubert and Mendelssohn. Mason's eyes rested awhile on the vague white folds of her dress, on the heavy convolutions of her hair, and the gentle movement of her head in sympathy with the music; then a glance in the other direction revealed another picture—the dazzling mid-day sky, the close-cropped lawn, lying almost black in its light, and the patient, round-backed gardener, in white shirt-sleeves, clipping the hedge or rolling the gravel. One morning, what with the music, the light, the heat, and the fragrance of the flowers —from the perfect equilibrium of his senses, as it were—Ferdinand fell into a doze. On waking he found that he had slept an hour, and that the sun

had invaded the verandah. The music had ceased; but on looking into the parlour he saw Miss Hofmann still at the piano. A gentleman was leaning on the instrument, with his back toward the window, intercepting her face. Mason sat for some moments, hardly sensible, at first, of his transition to consciousness, languidly guessing at her companion's identity. In a short time his observation was quickened by the fact that the picture before him was animated by no sound of voices. The silence was odd—almost unnatural. Mason moved his chair, and the gentleman, looking round, showed the face of Horace Knight. The Doctor called out "Good morning!" from his place, and finished his conversation with Miss Hofmann before coming out to his patient. When he moved away from the piano Mason saw the reason of his friends' silence. Miss Hofmann had been trying to decipher a difficult piece of music, the Doctor had been trying to assist her, and they had both been brought to a stop.

"What a clever fellow he is!" thought Mason. "There he stands, rattling off musical terms as if he had never thought of anything else. And yet when he talks pathology, it's impossible to talk more to the point." Mason continued to be very well satisfied with Knight's handling of his ailments. He had been in the country now for three weeks, and he would hesitate indeed to say that he felt materially better; but he had a much higher standard. There were moments when he feared to inquire too closely, because he had a sickening apprehension that he should discover that in one

or two important particulars he was not what he should be. In the course of time he imparted these fears to his physician. "But I may be mistaken," he added, "and for this reason. During the last fortnight I have become much more difficult. So long as I was in that beastly hotel I accepted each additional symptom as a matter of course. The more the better, I thought. But now I expect them to give an account of themselves. Now I have a positive wish to recover."

Dr. Knight looked at his patient for a moment curiously. "You are right," he said; "a little impatience is a very good thing."

"Oh, I am not impatient. I am patient to a ridiculous extent. I allow myself six months, at the very least."

"That is certainly not unreasonable," said Knight. "And will you allow me a question? Do you think of spending those six months in this place?"

"How can I tell you? I suppose I shall finish the summer here, unless the summer finishes me. Mrs. Mason will hear of nothing else. In September I hope to be well enough to go back to town, even if I am not well enough to think of work. What do you advise?"

"I advise you to put away the very name of work. That is imperative. Haven't you been at work all your life long? Can't you spare a pitiful little twelvemonth to recuperation and enjoyment?"

"Ah, enjoyment, enjoyment!" said Mason, ironically.

"Yes, enjoyment," returned the Doctor. "What has it done to you that you should speak of it in that manner?"

"Oh, it bothers me," said Mason.

"You are very fastidious. It's better to be bothered by pleasure than by pain."

"I don't deny it. But there is a way of being indifferent to pain. I don't mean to say that I have found it out, but in the course of my illness I have caught a glimpse of it. But it's beyond my strength to be indifferent to pleasure. In two words, I am afraid of dying of kindness."

"Ah, gammon!"

"Yes, it's gammon; and yet it's not. There would be nothing miraculous in my not getting well."

"It will be your fault if you don't. It will prove that you are fonder of being sick than of being sound, and that you're not fit company for reasonable mortals. Shall I tell you?" continued the Doctor, after a moment's hesitation. "When I knew you in the army I always found you a peg beyond my comprehension. You took things too hard. You had questions and considerations about everything. And on top of it all you were devoured with a mania for appearing to take things easily and not trouble your head. You played your part very well, but you must do me the justice to confess that it *was* a part."

"I hardly know whether that's a compliment or an impertinence. I hope, at least, that you don't mean to accuse me of playing a part at the present moment."

"On the contrary. I am your medical adviser; you are frank."

"It's not because you're my medical adviser that I am frank," said Mason. "I shouldn't think of bothering you in that capacity with my miserable caprices and whims;" and Ferdinand paused a moment. "You're a man!" he pursued, laying his hand on his companion's arm. "There's nothing here but women—heaven reward them! I am saturated with whispers and perfumes and smiles, and the rustling of dresses. It takes a man to understand a man."

"It takes more than a man to understand you, my dear Mason," said Knight, with a kindly smile. "But I will try."

Mason remained silent, leaning back in his chair, with his eyes wandering slowly over the wide patch of sky disclosed by the window, and his hands languidly folded on his knees. The Doctor examined him with a look half amused, half perplexed. But at last his face grew more stern and a little fold appeared in his forehead. He placed his hand on Mason's arm and shook it gently, while Ferdinand met his gaze. The Doctor frowned, and, as he did so, his companion gave a vague, scarcely audible, rather foolish, laugh. "If you don't get well," said Knight,—"if you don't get well——" And he paused.

"What will be the consequence?" asked Ferdinand, still laughing.

"I shall hate you; I shall think you did it on purpose."

"What shall I care for your hating me?"

"I shall tell people that you were a poor spiritless creature—that you are no loss."

"I give you leave," said Ferdinand.

The Doctor got up. "I don't like patients who are so mysterious," he said.

Ferdinand began to laugh louder, and ended in a fit of coughing.

"I'm getting too amusing," Knight remarked; "I must go."

"Laugh and grow fat," exclaimed Ferdinand. "I promise to get well." But that evening, at least, he was no better, as it turned out, for his momentary exhilaration. Before turning in for the night he went into the drawing-room to spend half-an-hour with the ladies. The room was empty, but the lamp was lighted, and he sat down by the table and read a chapter in a novel. He felt excited, light-headed, light-hearted, half-intoxicated, as if he had been drinking strong coffee. He put down his book, and went over to the mantelpiece, above which hung a mirror, and looked at the reflection of his face. For almost the first time in his life he examined it, wondering considerably if there was anything in it. He was able to say to himself only that he looked very thin and pale, and utterly unfit for the business of life. At last he heard an opening of doors overhead, and a rustling of voluminous skirts on the stairs. Mrs. Mason came in, fresh from the hands of her maid, and dressed for a party.

V.

"AND is Miss Hofmann going?" asked Mason. He felt that his heart was beating and that he hoped Mrs. Mason would say no. His momentary sense of strength, the mellow lamplight, the open piano, and the absence of the excellent woman before him, struck him as so many reasons for her remaining at home. But the sound of the young lady's step upon the stairs was not encouraging. She forthwith appeared upon the threshold, dressed in crape of a kind of violent blue, with desultory clusters of white roses. For some ten minutes Mason had the pleasure of watching that series of pretty movements and preparations with which women in full dress beguile the interval before their carriage is announced; their glances at the mirror, their slow assumption of their gloves, their mutual revisions and felicitations.

"Isn't she lovely?" said Miss Hofmann to the young man, nodding at her aunt, who looked precisely the handsome woman that she was.

"Lovely, lovely, lovely!" said Ferdinand, so emphatically, that Miss Hofmann transferred her glance to him; while Mrs. Mason good-humouredly turned her back, and Caroline saw that Mason was engaged in a survey of her own person.

"I wish very much you might come," the girl said.

"I shall go to bed," answered Ferdinand, simply.

"Well, that's much better. We shall go to bed at two o'clock. Meanwhile I shall caper about the rooms to the sound of a piano and fiddle, and

Aunt Maria will sit against the wall with her toes tucked under a chair. Such is life!"

"You will dance then," said Mason, not very brilliantly.

"I shall dance. Dr. Knight has invited me."

"Does he dance well, Caroline?" asked Mrs. Mason.

"That remains to be seen. I have a strong suspicion that he doesn't."

"Why?" Ferdinand inquired.

"He does so many other things well."

"That's no reason," said Mrs. Mason. "Do you dance, Ferdinand?"

"The dance of death!" Mason murmured.

"I like a man to dance," said Caroline, "and yet I like him not to dance."

"That's a very womanish speech, my dear," Mrs. Mason rejoined.

"I suppose it is. It's inspired by my white gloves, my low dress, my artificial roses. When once a woman gets on such things, Colonel Mason, expect nothing but nonsense.—Aunt Maria," the young lady continued, "will you button my glove?"

"Let me do it," said Ferdinand. "Your aunt has her gloves on."

"Thank you." And Miss Hofmann extended a long white arm, and drew back with her other hand the bracelet from her wrist. Her glove had a succession of buttons, and Mason performed the operation with great deliberation and neatness.

"And now," said he gravely, "I hear the carriage. You want me to put on your shawl."

"If you please." Miss Hofmann passed her

white cloak into his hands, and then turned about her fair shoulders. Mason solemnly covered them, while the waiting-maid, who had come in, performed the same service for the elder lady.

"Good-bye," said the latter, giving him her hand. "You are not to come out into the air." And Mrs. Mason, attended by her maid, transferred herself to the carriage. Miss Hofmann gathered up her loveliness and prepared to follow. Ferdinand stood leaning against the parlour-door, watching her; and as she rustled past him she nodded farewell, with a silent smile. A characteristic smile, Mason thought it,—a smile in which there was no expectation of triumph and no affectation of reluctance, but just the faintest suggestion of perfectly good-humoured resignation. Mason went to the window and saw the carriage roll away with its lighted lamps, and then stood looking out into the darkness. The sky was cloudy. As he turned away the maid-servant came in, and took from the table a pair of rejected gloves. "I hope you are feeling better, sir," she said, politely.

"Thank you; I think I am."

"It's a pity you couldn't have gone with the ladies."

"I am not well enough yet to think of such things," said Mason, trying to smile. But as he walked across the floor he felt himself attacked by a sudden sensation which cannot be better described than as a general collapse. He felt dizzy, faint, and sick. His head swam and his knees trembled. "I am very ill," he said, sitting down on the sofa; "you must call William."

William speedily arrived, and conducted the young man to his room. "What on earth have you been doing, sir?" asked this most irreproachable of serving-men, as he helped him to undress.

Ferdinand was silent a moment. "I have been putting on Miss Hofmann's shawl," he said.

"Is that all, sir?"

"And I have been buttoning her glove."

"Well, sir, you must be very prudent."

"So it appears," said Ferdinand.

He slept soundly, however, and the next morning was the better for it. "I certainly am better," he said to himself, as he slowly proceeded to his toilet. "A month ago such an attack as that of last evening would have given me a fever. Courage, then! The devil isn't dead, but he's dying."

In the afternoon he received a visit from Horace Knight. "So you danced last evening at Mrs. Bradshaw's," he said to his friend.

"Yes, I jumped about a little. It's a great piece of frivolity for a man in my position; but I thought there would be no harm in doing it just once, to show them I know how. My abstinence in future will tell the better. Your ladies were there. I danced with Miss Hofmann. She was dressed in blue, and she was the most beautiful woman in the room. Every one was crowding round her."

"I saw her before she went off," Mason said.

"You should have seen her there," Knight went on. "The music, the excitement, the spectators, and all that, bring out a woman's beauty."

"So I suppose."

"What strikes me," pursued the Doctor, "is her —what shall I call it?—her vitality, her quiet buoyancy. Of course you didn't see her when she came home. If you had you would have noticed, unless I am very much mistaken, that she was as fresh and elastic at two o'clock as she had been at ten. While all the other women looked tired and jaded and used up, she alone showed no signs of exhaustion. She was neither pale nor flushed, but still light-footed, rosy, erect. She's a capital one to go. You see I can't help looking at such things rather professionally. She has a magnificent organisation. Among all those other poor girls she seemed to have something of the inviolable strength of a goddess;" and Knight smiled, himself, at this unexpected flight. "She wears her artificial roses and dew-drops as if she had gathered them on the mountain-tops instead of buying them in Broadway. She moves with long steps, her dress rustles, and to a man of fancy it's the sound of Diana on the forest-leaves."

Ferdinand nodded assent. "So you are a man of fancy."

"In my private capacity," said the Doctor.

VI.

FERDINAND was not inclined to question his friend's estimate of Miss Hofmann or to weigh his words. They only served to confirm an impression which was already strong in his own mind. Day by day he had felt the growth of this

impression. "He must be a strong man who would approach her," he said to himself. "He must be as swift and sure as she herself, or in the progress of courtship she will leave him far behind. He must be able to forget his lungs and his liver and his digestion. To have broken down in his country's defence, even, will avail him nothing. What is that to her? She needs a man who has defended his country without breaking down—a being complete, intact, well-seasoned, invulnerable. Then—then," thought Ferdinand, "perhaps she will consider him. Perhaps it will be to refuse him. Perhaps, like Diana, to whom Knight compares her, she is meant to live without us fellows. It's certain, at least, that she is able to wait. She will be young at fifty-five. Women who are young at fifty-five are perhaps not the most sympathetic. They are likely to have felt for nobody and for nothing. But it's often less their own fault than that of the men and women around them. This one at least *can* feel; the thing is to move her. Her soul is an instrument of a hundred strings, only it will take a strong hand to draw sound. Once really touched, they will reverberate for ever and ever."

In a word, Mason began to romance to himself exactly as if he had been in love, and there is no manner of doubt that he was. It will be seen that his passion was not arrogant nor uncompromising, but, on the contrary, considerate, discreet, modest—almost timid. For ten long days, the most memorable days of his life—days which, if he had kept a journal, would have been

left blank—he held his tongue. He would have suffered everything rather than reveal his emotions, or allow them to come accidentally to Miss Hofmann's knowledge. He would cherish them in silence until he should feel in all his sinews that he was himself again, and then he would open his heart. Meanwhile he would be patient ; he would be the most irreproachable, the most austere, the most insignificant of convalescents. He was as yet unfit to touch her, to look at her, to speak to her. A man was not to go a-wooing in his dressing-gown and slippers.

There came a day, however, when, in spite of his vigilance, Ferdinand came near losing his balance. Mrs. Mason had arranged with him to drive in the phaeton after dinner. But it befell that, an hour before the appointed time, she was sent for by a neighbour who had been taken ill.

"But it's out of the question that you should lose your drive," said Miss Hofmann, who brought him her aunt's apologies. "If you are still disposed to go I shall be happy to take the reins. I shall not be as good company as Aunt Maria, but perhaps I shall be as good company as Thomas." It was settled, accordingly, that Miss Hofmann should act as her aunt's substitute, and at five o'clock the phaeton left the door. The first half of their drive was passed in silence ; and almost the first words they exchanged fell from their lips as they finally drew near a tract of enclosed land, beyond which, through the trees at its further extremity, they caught a glimpse of a turn in the river. Miss Hofmann involuntarily

pulled up. The sun had sunk low, and the cloudless western sky glowed with an exquisite tone. The trees which concealed the view flung over the grass a great screen of shadow, which reached out into the road. Between their scattered stems gleamed the broad white current of the Hudson. Our friends both knew the spot. Mason had seen it from a boat, when one morning a gentleman in the neighbourhood, thinking to do him a kindness, had invited him to take a short sail; and with Miss Hofmann it had long been a frequent resort.

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed, as the phaeton stopped.

"Yes, if it wasn't for those trees," said Ferdinand. "They conceal the best part of the view."

"I should rather say they indicate it," answered his companion. "From here they conceal it; but they suggest to you to make your way in, and lose yourself behind them, and enjoy the prospect in privacy."

"But you can't take a vehicle in."

"No: there is only a footpath, although I have ridden in. One of these days, when you are stronger, you must drive to this point, and get out, and walk over to the bank."

Mason was silent a moment—a moment during which he felt in his limbs the tremor of a bold resolution. "I noticed the place the day I went out on the water with Mr. Masters. I immediately marked it as my own. The bank is quite high, and the trees make a little amphitheatre on its summit. I think there is a bench."

"Yes, there are two benches," said Caroline.

"Suppose, then, we try it now," said Mason, with an effort.

"But you can never walk over that meadow. You see it's broken ground. And, at all events, I can't consent to your going alone."

"That, madam," said Ferdinand, rising to his feet in the phaeton, "is a piece of folly I should never think of proposing. Yonder is a house, and in it there are people. Can't we drive there, and place the horse in their custody?"

"Nothing is more easy, if you insist upon it. The house is occupied by a poor German family, and there are a couple of children, who are old friends of mine. When I come here on horseback they always clamour for 'coppers.' From their little garden the walk is shorter."

So Miss Hofmann turned the horse toward the cottage, which stood at the head of a lane, a few yards from the road. A little boy and girl, with bare heads and bare feet—the former extremities very white, and the latter very black—came out to meet her. Caroline greeted them good-humouredly in German. The girl, who was the elder, consented to watch the horse, while the boy volunteered to show the visitors the shortest way to the Hudson. Mason reached the point in question without extreme fatigue, and found a prospect which would have repaid even greater trouble. To the right and to the left, a hundred feet below them, stretched the broad channel of the noble river. In the distance rose the gentle masses of the Catskills, with all the intervening

region vague and neutral in the gathering twilight. A faint odour of coolness came up to their faces from the stream below.

"You can sit down," said the little boy, doing the honours.

"Yes, Colonel, sit down," said Caroline. "You have already been on your feet too much."

Ferdinand obediently seated himself, unable to deny that he was glad to do so. Miss Hofmann released from her grasp the skirts which she had gathered up in her passage from the phaeton, and strolled to the edge of the cliff, where she stood for some moments talking with her little guide. Mason could only hear that she was speaking German. Presently Miss Hofmann turned back, still talking—or rather listening—to the child.

"He is very pretty," she said in French, as she stopped before Ferdinand.

Mason broke into a laugh. "To think that that dirty little youngster should forbid us the use of two languages! Do you speak French, my child?"

"No," said the boy sturdily, "I speak German."

"Ah, there I can't follow you!"

The child stared a moment, and then replied, with pardonable irrelevancy, "I will show the way down to the water."

"There I can't follow you either. I hope *you* will not go, Miss Hofmann," added the young man, observing a movement on Caroline's part.

"Is it hard?" she asked of the child.

"No, it's easy."

"Shall I tear my dress?"

The child shook his head; and Caroline descended the bank under his guidance.

As a certain time elapsed before she reappeared, Ferdinand ventured to the edge of the cliff, and looked down. She was sitting on a rock, on the narrow margin of sand, with her hat in her lap, twisting the feather in her fingers. In a few moments it seemed to Ferdinand that he caught the tones of her voice, wafted upward as if she were gently singing. He listened intently, and at last succeeded in distinguishing several words; they were German. "Confound her German!" thought the young man. Suddenly Miss Hofmann rose from her seat, and, after a short interval, reappeared on the platform. "What did you find down there?" asked Ferdinand, almost savagely.

"Nothing—a little strip of a beach and a pile of stones."

"You *have* torn your dress," said Mason.

Miss Hofmann surveyed her drapery. "Where, if you please?"

"There, in front." And Mason poked out his walking-stick, and inserted it into the injured fold of muslin. There was a certain unexpected violence in the movement which attracted Miss Hofmann's attention. She looked at her companion, and, seeing that his face was discomposed, supposed that he was annoyed at having been compelled to wait.

"Thank you," she said; "it's easily mended. And now suppose we go back."

"No, not yet," said Ferdinand. "We have plenty of time."

"Plenty of time to catch cold," said Miss Hofmann, kindly.

Mason had planted his stick where he had let it fall on withdrawing it from contact with his companion's skirts, and stood leaning against it, with his eyes on the girl's face. "What if I do catch cold?" he asked, abruptly.

"Come, don't talk nonsense," said Miss Hofmann.

"I never was more serious in my life." And, pausing a moment, he drew a couple of steps nearer. She had gathered her mantilla closely about her, and stood with her arms lost in it, holding her elbows. "I don't mean that quite literally," Mason continued. "I wish to get well, on the whole. But there are moments when this perpetual self-coddling seems beneath the dignity of man, and I am tempted to purchase one short hour of enjoyment, of happiness, at the cost—well, at the cost of my life, if necessary!"

This was a richer speech than Ferdinand had yet made; the reader may estimate his habitual reserve. Miss Hofmann must have been somewhat surprised, and even a good deal puzzled. But it was plain that he expected a rejoinder.

"I don't know what temptations you may have had," she answered, smiling; "but I confess that I can think of none in your present circumstances likely to involve the great sacrifice you speak of. What you say, Colonel Mason, is rather——"

"Rather what?"

"Rather ungrateful. Aunt Maria flatters herself that she has made existence as easy and as

peaceful for you—as stupid, if you like—as it can possibly be for a—a clever man. And now, after all, to accuse her of introducing temptations!"

"Your Aunt Maria is the best of women, Miss Hofmann," said Mason. "But I am very far from being a clever man. I am deplorably weak-minded. Very little things excite me. Very small pleasures are gigantic temptations. I would give a great deal, for instance, to stay here with you for half-an-hour."

It is a delicate question whether Miss Hofmann now ceased to be perplexed; whether she perceived in the young man's accents—it was his tone, his attitude, his eyes, that were fully significant, rather than his words—an intimation of that sublime and simple truth in the presence of which a wise woman puts off coquetry and prudery, and tries to be human and charitable. But charity is nothing if not discreet; and Miss Hofmann may very well have effected the little transaction I speak of, and yet have remained, as she did remain, gracefully wrapped in her mantle, with the same serious smile on her face. Ferdinand's heart was thumping under his waistcoat; the words in which he sought to tell her that he loved her were fluttering there like frightened birds in a storm-shaken cage. Whether his lips would form them or not depended on the next words she uttered. On the faintest sign of defiance or of impatience he would really give her something to coquet withal. I repeat that I do not undertake to follow Miss Hofmann's feelings; I only know that her words were those of a woman of superior

instincts. "My dear Colonel Mason," she said, "I wish we might remain here the whole evening. Such moments as these are quite too pleasant to be wantonly sacrificed. I simply put you on your conscience. If you believe that you can safely do so—that you will not have some dreadful chill, or fit, or spasm, in consequence—let us by all means stay awhile. If you do not so believe, let us go back to the carriage. There is no good reason that I see for our behaving like very small children."

If Miss Hofmann apprehended a "scene"—I do not assert that she did—she was saved. Mason extracted from her words a refined assurance that he could afford to wait. "You are an angel, Miss Hofmann," he said, as a sign that he had understood her. "I think we had better go back."

Miss Hofmann accordingly led the way along the path, and Ferdinand slowly followed. A man who has submitted to a woman's wisdom generally feels bound to persuade himself that he has capitulated on his own terms. I suppose it was in this spirit that Mason said to himself as he walked along, "Well, I got what I wanted."

VII.

THE next morning he was again an invalid. He woke up with symptoms which as yet he had scarcely felt at all; and he was obliged to acknowledge the bitter truth that, small as it was, his effort the day before had exceeded his strength.

The walk, the evening air, the dampness of the spot, had combined to produce a violent attack of fever. As soon as it became plain that, in vulgar terms, he was "in for it," he took his heart in his hands and let himself go. As his condition grew worse, he was fortunately relieved from the custody of this valuable organ, with all it contained of hopes deferred and shattered visions, by several intervals of prolonged unconsciousness.

For three weeks he was a very sick man; for a couple of days his recovery was doubted of. Mrs. Mason nursed him with inexhaustible patience and with the solicitude of real affection. She was resolved that greedy death should not possess himself, through any fault of hers, of a career so full of bright possibilities and of that active gratitude which a good-natured elderly woman would relish, as she felt that of her *protégé* to be. Her vigils were finally rewarded. One fine morning poor long-silent Ferdinand found words to tell her that he was better. His recovery was very slow, however, and it failed to bring him back to his old point: it stopped many degrees short of that. He was thus doubly a convalescent—a sufficiently miserable fellow. He professed to be very much surprised to find himself still among the living. He remained silent and grave, with a fresh fold in his forehead, like a man honestly perplexed at the vagaries of destiny. "It must be," he said to Mrs. Mason —"it must be that I am reserved for great things."

Ferdinand learned that, in order to make the

house as quiet as possible, Miss Hofmann had gone to stay with a friend, at a distance of some five miles. On the first day that the young man was well enough to sit in his arm-chair Mrs. Mason spoke of her niece's return, which was fixed for the morrow. "She will want very much to see you," she said. "When she comes may I bring her into your room?"

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed Ferdinand, to whom the idea was very repugnant. He met her accordingly at dinner, three days later. He left his room just in time for this repast, in company with Dr. Knight, who happened then to be taking his departure. In the hall they encountered Mrs. Mason, who invited the Doctor to remain, in honour of his patient's reappearance in society. The Doctor hesitated a moment, and, as he did so, Ferdinand heard Miss Hofmann's step descending the stair. He turned towards her just in time to catch on her face the vanishing of a glance of intelligence. As Mrs. Mason's back was against the staircase, her glance was evidently meant for Knight. He excused himself on the plea of an engagement, to Mason's regret, while the latter greeted the younger lady. Mrs. Mason proposed another day—the following Sunday; the Doctor assented, and it was not till some time later that Ferdinand found himself wondering why Miss Hofmann should have told him—in that inaudible way—not to remain. He rapidly perceived that during the period of their separation this young lady had not become any less attractive. It seemed to Mason, moreover, that the ripe

cluster of her charms was held together by a certain pensive gentleness, a tender, submissive look, which he had hitherto failed to observe; and some reflections to which Mrs. Mason treated him in a day or two persuaded him that he was not the victim of an illusion.

"I wonder what is the matter with Caroline," she said. "If it were not that she tells me that she never was better, I should believe she was going to be ill. Pray, is your sickness catching? I have never seen her so mild and vague. She looks like a person who has a great fright—but a fright not altogether unpleasant."

"She has been staying in a house full of people," said Mason. "She has been excited, and amused, and preoccupied; she returns to you and me (excuse the juxtaposition—it exists); a kind of reaction asserts itself." Ferdinand's explanation was ingenious rather than plausible.

Mrs. Mason had a better one. "I have an impression that George Stapleton, the second of the sons, is an old admirer of Caroline's. It's hard to believe that he could have been in the house with her for a fortnight without renewing his suit in some form or other."

Ferdinand was not made uneasy, for he had seen and talked with Mr. George Stapleton—a young man, very good-looking, very good-natured, very clever, very rich, and very unlikely, as he conceived, to be cared for by Miss Hofmann. "You don't mean to say that your niece has listened to him," he answered, calmly enough.

"Listened! yes. He has made himself agree-

able, and he has succeeded in making an impression —a temporary impression," added Mrs. Mason, with a business-like air.

"I can't believe it," said Ferdinand.

"Why not? He's a very nice fellow."

"Yes—yes," said Mason, "very nice indeed. He is very rich too." And here the talk was interrupted by Caroline's entrance.

On Sunday the two ladies went to church. It was not till after they had gone that Ferdinand left his room. He came into the little parlour, took up a book, felt something of the stir of his old intellectual life. Should he ever again know what it was to measure his mind with something? In the course of an hour the ladies came home with that air of relief and reaction which people wear on emerging from their devotions. Mrs. Mason soon went out again, leaving the others together. Miss Hofmann asked Ferdinand what he had been reading; and he was thus led on to declare that he really believed he should, after all, get the use of his head again. She listened with the respect which an intelligent woman who leads an idle life necessarily feels for a clever man when he consents to make her in some degree the confidant of his intellectual purposes. Mason talked with her for half-an-hour, and told himself afterwards that he had "swaggered" a good deal. But she appeared to take his swagger very seriously; she drew him out so!

VIII.

KNIGHT duly made his appearance at dinner, and proved himself once more the entertaining gentleman whom our friends had long since learned to appreciate. But Mason, fresh from his contest with morals and metaphysics, was forcibly struck with the fact that he was one of those men from whom these sturdy beggars receive more kicks than halfpence. He was nevertheless obliged to admit that, if he was not a man of meditation, he was a highly civilised being. After dinner the company adjourned to the piazza, where, in the course of half-an-hour, the Doctor proposed to Miss Hofmann to take a turn in the grounds. All around the lawn there wound a narrow footpath, concealed from view, in spots, by clusters of shrubbery. Ferdinand and his hostess sat watching their retreating figures as they slowly measured the sinuous strip of gravel; Miss Hofmann's light dress and the Doctor's white waistcoat gleaming at intervals through the dark verdure. At the end of twenty minutes they returned to the house. The Doctor came back only to make his bow and to take his departure; and, when he had gone, Miss Hofmann retired to her own room. The next morning she mounted her horse and rode over to see the friend with whom she had stayed at the time of Mason's relapse. Ferdinand saw her pass his window, erect in the saddle, with her horse scattering the gravel with his nervous steps. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Mason came into the

room, sat down by the young man, made her habitual inquiries as to his condition, and then paused in such a way that he instantly felt she had something to tell him. "You have something to tell me," he said; "what is it?"

Mrs. Mason blushed a little, and laughed. "I was first made to promise to keep it a secret. If I am so transparent now that I have leave to tell it, what should I be if I hadn't? Guess."

Ferdinand shook his head with the least bit of irritation. "I can't guess."

"Caroline is engaged."

"To whom?"

"Not to Mr. Stapleton—to Dr. Knight."

Ferdinand was silent a moment, but he neither changed colour nor dropped his eyes. Then, at last, "Did she wish you not to tell me?" he inquired.

"She wished me to tell no one. But I prevailed upon her to let me tell *you*."

"Thank you," said Ferdinand, trying to smile.

"It's a great surprise," continued Mrs. Mason. "I never suspected it. And there I was talking about Mr. Stapleton! I don't see how they have managed it. Well, I suppose it's for the best. But it seems odd that Caroline should have refused so many superior offers to cast her lot at last with a country doctor!"

Ferdinand felt for an instant as if the power of speech was deserting him; but he made a successful effort to recover it.

"She might do worse," he said, mechanically.

Mrs. Mason glanced at him as if she had been

struck by the sound of his voice. "You are not surprised, then?"

"I hardly know. I never supposed there was anything between them, and yet, now that I look back, there has been nothing against it. They have talked of each other neither too much nor too little. Upon my word, they're an accomplished couple!" Glancing back at the manner in which his friends had kept their secret, Ferdinand—strange as it may seem—could not repress a certain impulse of sympathetic admiration. He had had no vulgar rival. "Yes," he repeated gravely, "she might do worse."

"I suppose she might. He's poor, but he's clever; and I am sure I hope to goodness he loves her!"

"May I ask whether they became engaged yesterday on that walk around the lawn?"

"No; it would be fine if they had, under our very noses! It was all done while Caroline was at the Stapletons'. It was agreed between them yesterday that she should tell me at once."

"And when are they to be married?"

"In October, if possible. Caroline told me to tell you that she counts upon your staying for the wedding."

"Staying where?" asked Mason, with a little nervous laugh.

"Staying here, of course—in the house."

Ferdinand looked his hostess full in the face, taking her hand as he did so. "'The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.'"

"Ah, hold your tongue!" cried Mrs. Mason, pressing his hand. "How can you be so horrible? When Caroline leaves me, Ferdinand, I shall be quite alone. The tie which binds us together will be very much loosened by her marriage. I can't help thinking that it was never very close when I consider that I have had no part in the most important step of her life. I don't complain. I suppose it's natural enough. Perhaps it's the fashion—come in with striped petticoats and pea-jackets. Only it makes me feel like an old woman. It removes me twenty years at a bound from my own engagement, and the day I burst out crying on my mother's neck because your uncle had told a young girl I knew that he thought I had a lovely figure. I had then! Nowadays I suppose they tell the young ladies themselves, and have them cry on their own necks. It's a great saving of time. But I shall miss Caroline all the same; and then, Ferdinand, I shall make a great deal of you."

"The more the better," said Ferdinand; and at this moment Mrs. Mason was called away.

Ferdinand had not been in the army for nothing; he had received a blow as sharp as a sabre-cut, and he resolved to bear it like a soldier. He refused to allow himself a single moment of self-compassion. On the contrary, he spared himself none of the hard names that occur to a man who finds he has been living in a fool's paradise. For not guessing Caroline's secret he was perhaps excusable. Women were all inscrutable, and this one especially so. But Knight was a man like himself—a man whom he esteemed and liked,

but whom he was reluctant to credit with a deeper and more noiseless current of feeling than his own, for his own was no babbling brook, betraying its course through green leaves. Knight had loved modestly and decently, but frankly and heartily, like a man who was not ashamed of what he was doing, and if he had not found it out it was his own fault. What else had he to do? He had been a besotted day-dreamer, while his friend had simply come to the point. He deserved his injury, and he would bear it in silence. He had been unable to get well on an illusion; he would now try getting well on a truth. This was very tonic treatment, the reader will admit, likely to kill if it didn't cure.

Miss Hofmann was absent for several hours. At dinner-time she had not returned, and Mrs. Mason and the young man accordingly sat down without her. After dinner Ferdinand went into the little parlour, quite indifferent as to how soon he should meet her. Seeing or not seeing her, time hung equally heavy. Shortly after her companions had risen from table she rode up to the door, dismounted, tired and hungry, passed directly into the dining-room, and sat down to eat in her habit. In half-an-hour she came out, and, crossing the hall on her way upstairs, saw Mason in the parlour. She turned round, and, gathering up her long skirt, stopped at the door to bid him good-day. He left his chair, and went towards her. Her face wore a somewhat tired smile.

"So you are going to be married," he began, abruptly.

"So they say."

"I congratulate you. Excuse me if I don't do it with the last grace. I feel all I dare to feel."

"Don't be afraid," said Caroline, patting her skirt softly with her whip.

"I am not sure that it's not more unexpected than even such things have a right to be. There's no doubt about it?"

"None whatever."

"Well, Knight is a very good fellow. I haven't seen him yet," he went on, as Caroline was silent. "I don't know that I am in any hurry to see him. But I mean to talk to him. I mean to tell him that if he doesn't do his duty by you I shall——"

"Well?"

"I shall remind him of it."

"Oh, I shall do that," said Miss Hofmann.

Ferdinand looked at her gravely. "By heaven, you know," he cried with intensity, "it must be either one thing or the other!"

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, I understand myself. You are not a woman to be wasted, sacrificed."

Caroline made a gesture of impatience. "I don't understand you," she repeated. "You must excuse me. I am very tired." And she went rapidly up stairs.

On the following day Ferdinand had an opportunity to offer his felicitations to the Doctor. "I don't congratulate you on doing it," he said, "so much as on the way you have done it."

"What do you know about the way?" asked Knight.

"Nothing whatever. That's just my point. You took good care of that. And you are to be married in October?"

"I hope so. Very quietly, I suppose. The parson to do it, and Mrs. Mason and my mother and you to see it's done properly." And the Doctor put his hand on Ferdinand's shoulder.

"Oh, I am the last person to choose," said Mason. "If he were to omit anything I should take good care not to call attention to it." It is often said that, next to great joy, no state of mind is so frolicsome as great distress. It was in virtue of this truth, I suppose, that Ferdinand was able to be facetious. He kept his spirits—he talked and smiled and lounged about with the same look of reluctant incapacity as before. During the interval before the time appointed for the wedding it was agreed between the parties interested that Miss Hofmann should go over and spend a few days with her future mother-in-law, where she might partake more freely and privately than at home of the pleasure of her lover's company. She was absent a week; a week during which Ferdinand was thrown entirely upon his hostess for entertainment and diversion—things he had a very keen sense of needing. There were moments when it seemed to him that he was living by mere force of will, and that if he loosened the screws for a single instant he should sink back upon his bed again and never leave it. He had forbidden himself to think of Caroline, and had prescribed a course of meditation upon that other mistress, his first love, with whom he had long since exchanged

pledges—her of a hundred names—work, letters, philosophy, fame. But, after Caroline had gone, it was exceedingly difficult not to think of her. Even in absence she was supremely conspicuous. The most that Ferdinand could do was to take refuge in books—an immense number of which he now read, fiercely, passionately, voraciously—in conversation with Mrs. Mason, and in such society as he found in his path. Mrs. Mason was a great gossip—a gossip on a scale so liberal as to transform the foible into a virtue—a gossip, moreover, of imagination and sympathy, dealing with the future as well as the present and the past—with all the things people might do, as well as those they had already done or not done. With her, then, Ferdinand talked of his own future, into which she entered with enthusiasm, almost with violence. Mrs. Mason planned out a residence in Europe for her nephew, in the manner of one who knew her ground. Caroline once married, she herself would go abroad and fix herself in one of the several capitals in which an American widow with an easy income may contrive to support existence. She would make her dwelling a base of supplies—a *pied-à-terre*—for Ferdinand, who, taking his time to it, should visit every object of interest in the ancient and modern world. She would leave him free to go and come as he pleased, and to live as he listed; and I may say that, thanks to Mrs. Mason's observation of foreign manners, this allowance covered in her view quite as much as it did in poor Ferdinand's, who had never been out of his

own country. All that she would ask of him would be to show himself two or three times a year in her drawing-room, and tell her stories of what he had seen; that drawing-room which she already saw in her mind's eye—a compact little *entresol*, with tapestry hangings in the doorways and a coach-house in the court. Mrs. Mason was not a severe moralist; but she was too enlightened a woman to wish to demoralise her nephew—to persuade him to trifle with his future—that future of which the war had already made light in its own impudent fashion. She loved him; she thought him the most brilliant, the most promising, of the new generation. She looked to the day when his name would be on men's lips, and it would be a great piece of good fortune to have inadvertently married his uncle. Herself a great observer of men and manners, she wished to give him advantages which had been sterile in her own case.

IX.

In the way of society Ferdinand made calls with his hostess, went out twice to dine, and caused Mrs. Mason herself to entertain company at dinner. He presided on these occasions with distinguished urbanity. It happened, moreover, that invitations had been out some days for a party at the Stapletons'—Miss Hofmann's friends—and that, as there was to be no dancing, Ferdinand boldly announced his intention of being present. "Who knows?" he said; "it may do me more good than

harm. We can go late, and come away early." Mrs. Mason doubted of the wisdom of the act; but she finally assented, and prepared herself. It was late when they left home, and when they arrived the rooms—rooms of exceptional vastness—were at their fullest. Mason received on this his first appearance in society a flattering welcome, and in a very few moments found himself in exclusive possession of Miss Edith Stapleton, Caroline's particular friend. This young lady has had no part in our story, because our story is perforce short, and condemned to confine itself to the essential. If I had had more room to turn round I should long since have whispered to the reader that Miss Stapleton—who was a charming girl—had conceived a decided preference for our Ferdinand over all other men whomsoever. That Ferdinand was utterly ignorant of the circumstance is our excuse for passing it by; and we linger upon it, therefore, only long enough to suggest that the young girl must have been very happy at this particular moment.

"Is Miss Hofmann here?" Mason asked, as he accompanied her into an adjoining room.

"Do you call that being here?" said Miss Stapleton, looking across the apartment.

There he beheld Miss Hofmann, shining like a queen and fronted by a semi-circle of half-a-dozen men. Her head and shoulders rose serene from the vaporous surge of her white dress, and she looked and listened with that half-abstracted air which is pardonable in a woman beset by admirers. When Caroline's eyes fell upon her friend she

stared a moment, surprised, and then made him the friendliest bow in the world—a bow so friendly that her little circle divided to let it pass and looked round to see where the deuce it was going. Taking advantage of this circumstance, Miss Hofmann advanced several steps. Ferdinand went towards her, and there, in sight of all the company, she gave him her hand and smiled at him with extraordinary sweetness. They went back together to Miss Stapleton, and Caroline made him sit down, she and her friend placing themselves on either side. For half-an-hour Ferdinand had the honour of engrossing the attention of the two most charming persons present—and, thanks to this distinction, indeed the attention of the whole company. After which the two young ladies conducted him from room to room and presented to him the people of importance as if he had been a prince. Ferdinand rose to the level of the occasion, and conducted himself with unprecedented gallantry. Upon others, doubtless, he made a sufficiently good impression, but to himself he was an object almost of awe. He was obliged, however, to fortify himself with repeated draughts of wine; and even with the aid of this artificial stimulant he was unable to conceal from Mrs. Mason and his physician that he was looking far too much like an invalid to be properly where he was.

"Was there ever anything like the avidity of these dreadful girls?" said Mrs. Mason to the Doctor. "They will let a man swoon at their feet sooner than abridge a *tête-à-tête* that amuses them. Then they'll have up another. Look at little Miss

Masters, yonder, with Ferdinand and George Stapleton before her. She has got them contradicting each other, and she looks like a Roman fast lady at the circus. What does she care, so long as she makes her evening? They like a man to look as if he were going to die—it's interesting."

Knight went over to his friend, and told him with much decision that it was high time he should be at home and in bed. "You're looking fearfully," he added, candidly, as Ferdinand resisted.

"You are looking as fresh as a rose, Colonel Mason," said Miss Masters, a very audacious little person, overhearing this speech.

"It isn't a matter of taste," said the Doctor, angrily; "it's a fact." And he led away his patient.

Ferdinand insisted that he had not hurt himself; that, on the contrary, he was feeling uncommonly well; but his face contradicted him. He continued for two or three days more to go through the forms of returning vitality with a courage worthy of a better cause. Then at last he broke down altogether. He settled himself on his pillows, and fingered his watch, and began to wonder how many revolutions he should still witness of those exquisite little needles. The Doctor came, and gave him a sound rating for his imprudence. Ferdinand listened to him patiently, and then assured him that prudence or imprudence had nothing to do with it, that death had taken fast hold of him, and that now his only concern was to make easy terms with his captor. In the course of the same day he sent for a lawyer and made certain alterations

in his will. He had no known relatives, and his modest patrimony stood bequeathed to a gentleman of his acquaintance who had no real need of it. He now divided it into two unequal portions, the smaller of which he devised to William Bowles, Mrs. Mason's man-servant and his personal attendant; and the larger—which represented a considerable sum—to Horace Knight. He informed Mrs. Mason of these arrangements, and was pleased to have her approval.

From this moment his strength began rapidly to ebb, and the shattered fragments of his long-resisting will floated down its shallow current into dissolution. It was useless to attempt to talk, to beguile the interval, to watch the signs, or to count the hours. A constant attendant was established at his side, and Mrs. Mason appeared only at infrequent moments. It seemed to the poor woman that her heart was broken, and she spent a great deal of time in weeping. Miss Hofmann remained, naturally, at Mrs. Knight's. "As far as I can judge," Horace had said to her, "it will be a matter of a week. But it's the most extraordinary case I ever heard of. The man was steadily getting well. Everything was going on as it ought—up to that Sunday I dined at your aunt's. Then, suddenly, he went straight back. It's very puzzling." On the fifth day he had driven Miss Hofmann home, at her suggestion that it was no more than decent that she should give the young man some sign of sympathy. Horace went up to Ferdinand's bedside, and found the poor fellow in the languid middle condition between sleeping and waking in

which he had passed the last forty-eight hours. "Colonel," he asked gently, "do you think you could see Caroline?"

For all answer Ferdinand opened his eyes. Horace went out, and led his companion back into the darkened room. She came softly up to the bedside, stood looking down for a moment at the sick man, and then stooped over him.

"I thought I would come and make you a little visit," she said. "Does it disturb you?"

"Not in the least," Mason answered, looking at her steadily. "Not half as much as it would have done a week ago. Please sit down."

"Thank you. Horace won't let me. I will come again."

"You will not have another chance," said Ferdinand. "I am not good for more than two days yet. Tell them to go out. I wish to see you alone. I wouldn't have sent for you, but, now that you are here, I might as well take advantage of it."

"Have you anything particular to say?" asked Knight, kindly.

"Oh come," said Mason, with a smile which he meant to be good-natured, but which was only ghastly; "you are not going to be jealous of me at this time of day."

Knight looked at Miss Hofmann for permission, and then left the room with the nurse. But a minute had hardly elapsed before Miss Hofmann hurried into the adjoining apartment, with her face pale and discomposed.

"Go to him!" she exclaimed. "He is dying!"

When they reached him he was dead.

In the course of a few days his will was opened, and Knight came to the knowledge of his legacy. "He was a good, generous fellow," he said to Mrs. Mason and Miss Hofmann, "and I shall never be satisfied that he might not have recovered. It was a most extraordinary case." He was considerate enough of his audience to abstain from adding that he would have given a great deal to be able to make an autopsy. Miss Hofmann's nuptials were of course not deferred; they took place in October, "very quietly." It seemed to her lover in the interval that she was very silent and thoughtful; but this certainly was natural under the circumstances.

1868.

THE END.

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